6071

Vietnam Studies Group

Gun Trucks

by Timothy J. Kutta

squadron/signal publications

DON GREER

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Cover

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Dedication

To Susan, Karen and Timmy

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Curtis Haag, Tom Pregi, Jim Mesko, Terry Love and all the Guntruckers who contributed their pictures and stories, Mrs. Carolyn D. Wright and the United States Army Transportation Museum.

(Overleaf) The *EVE OF DESTRUCTION,* driving along Route 19, was the symbol of the gun trucks of the 8th Transportation Group. *EVE* was a M-54 5-ton truck armed with four M2 .50 caliber machine guns, a twin mount at the rear and two single mounts, one on each side. She was a double walled version with two rows of armor plate on the vehicle sides. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Introduction

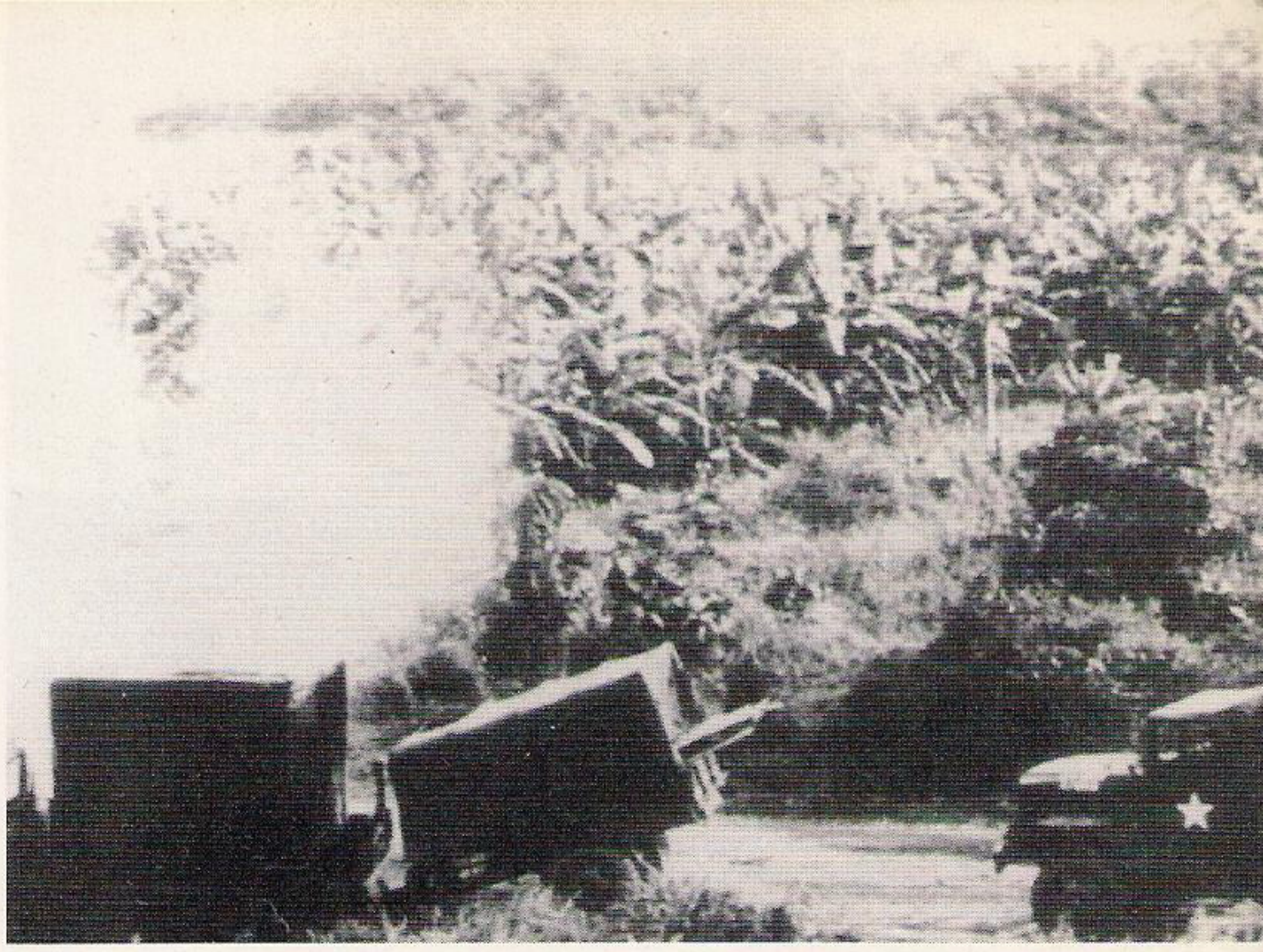
"Ambush!, Ambush!, Ambush!", the words crackled through the static of the radios of the convoy as it proceeded down Highway 19 toward Pleiku, Republic of Vietnam. Suddenly, the explosion of a recoilless rifle shattered the morning calm. It was 0815, 4 December 1967. A convoy of seventy-seven trucks from the 54th Transportation Battalion, 8th Transportation Group were suddenly buffeted with a hail of withering small arms fire from an enemy company hidden along the road.

The driver of the lead truck died instantly as an enemy 57MM recoilless rifle round tore through the cab of his vehicle. The jeep following the truck was also hit. The convoy was now trapped in the 3,000 meter long "kill zone" of the enemy ambush.

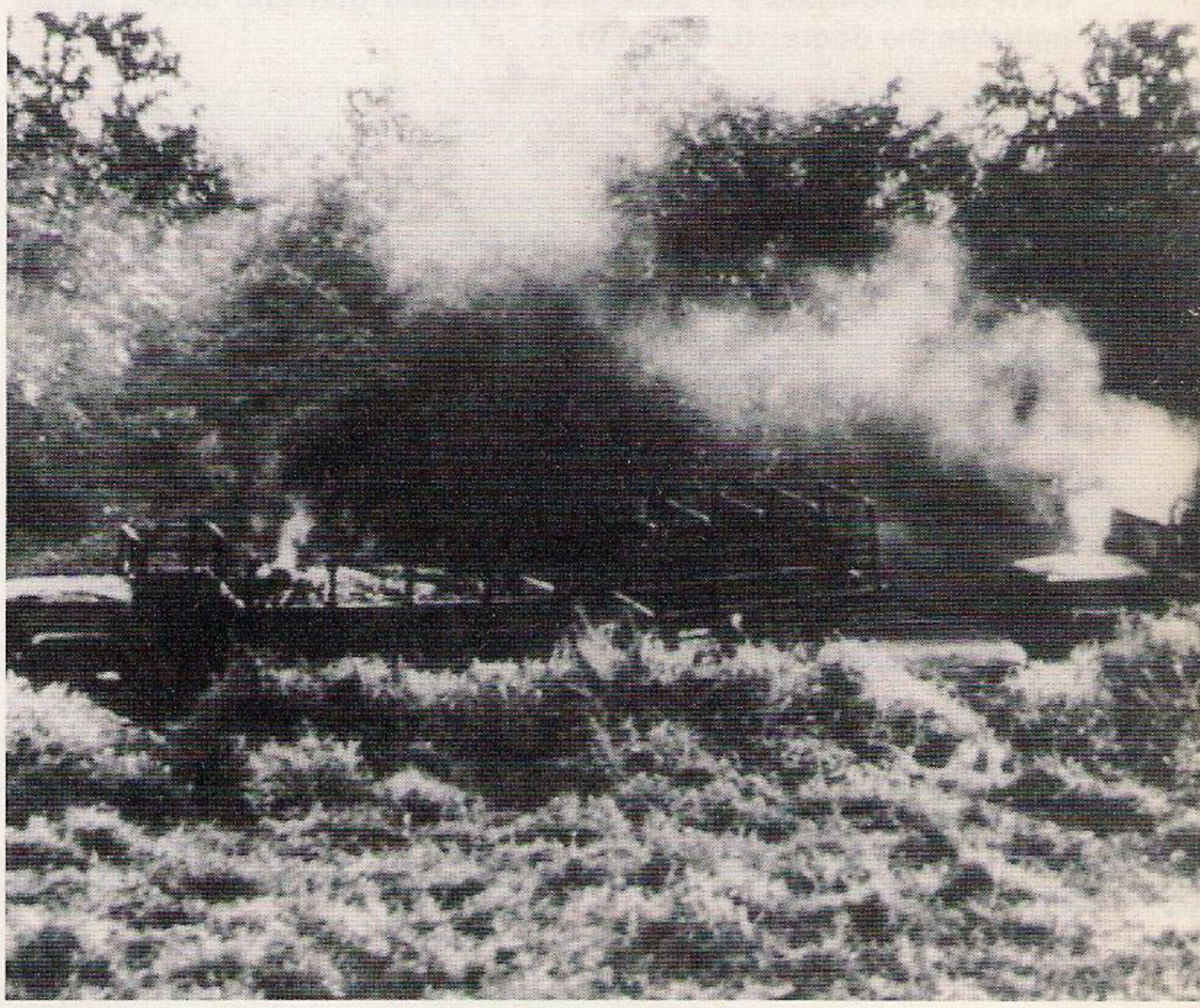
The commander of the Viet Cong company was confident that he had his prey trapped. He had been told to destroy the convoy and kill all the drivers. The destruction of the trucks would send the Americans a clear message, they could not operate their trucks on Highway 19. In order to carry out his mission the enemy had armed their men with satchel charges. Once the convoy was stopped the Viet Cong would move through the convoy, systematically destroying each truck and slaughtering any remaining Americans. The enemy hoped that the massacre would not only give them a great military victory, but would also win a political victory and fuel the growing anti-war sentiment in the United States.

Suddenly, the enemy's plans evaporated as six of the trucks in the kill zone opened fire with their machine guns. These were American gun trucks. Each truck had armored sides and was armed to the teeth with machine guns. Within minutes the American gunners were firing back at the enemy with twelve 7.62MM M60 machine guns. The automatic weapons soon found their mark and a dozen enemy soldiers were cut down as they tried to move forward. 1st Lieutenant Todd, the convoy commander, called for an airstrike and the reaction force. After that, he bravely moved among the trucks spurring the drivers and directing their fire. Adding the fire of their M-16 rifles and M79 grenade launchers to the roar of the machine guns, the Americans were soon driving the enemy out of the ambush. site

Help arrived within minutes. At 0827, a helicopter gunship swooped over the ambush site firing at the retreating enemy. A few minutes later reinforcements arrived. The Americans lost one man killed, six wounded and the convoy had lost one truck. The enemy had paid dearly during



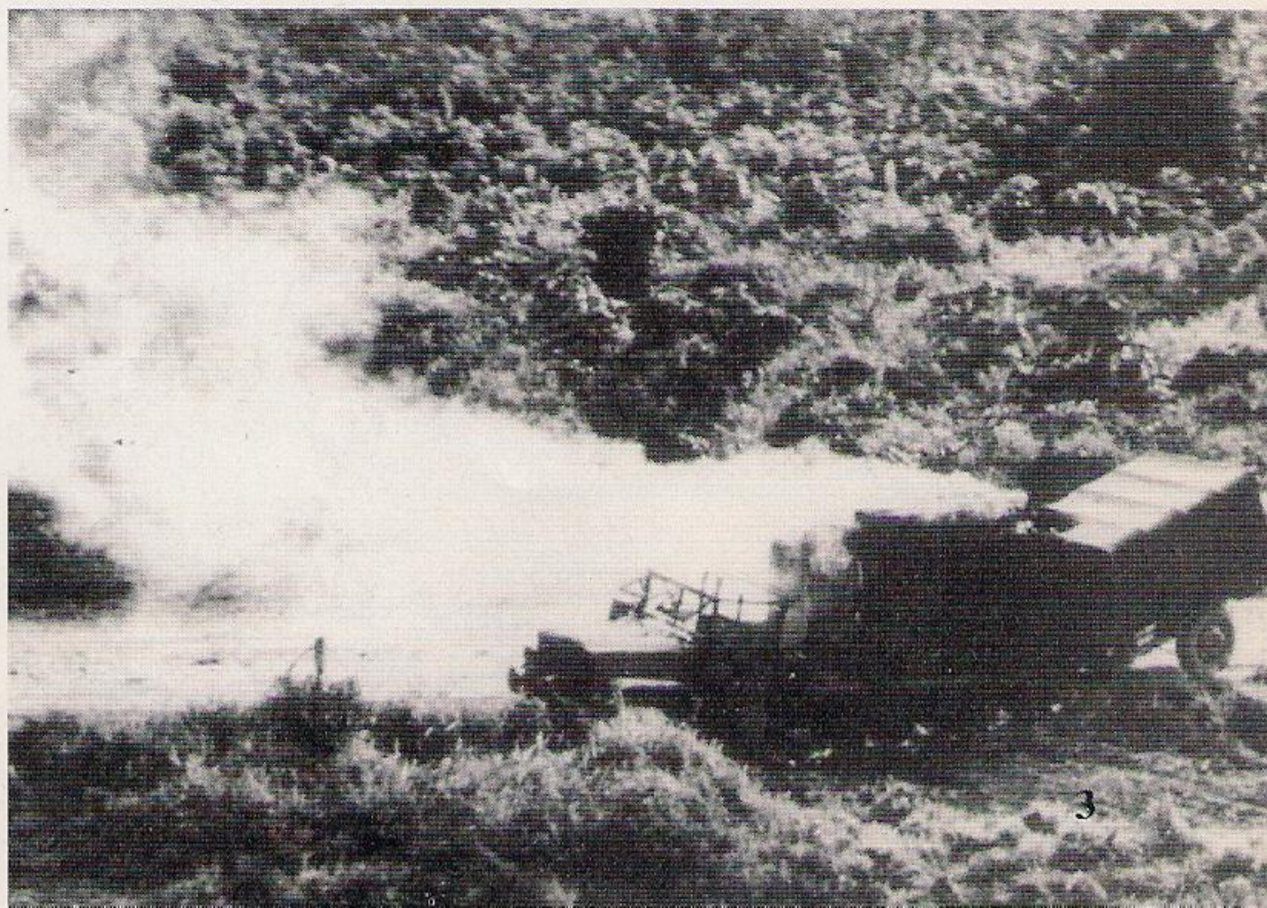
This Viet Cong ambush happened near Xuan Loc in November of 1966. The enemy had broken the eighty vehicles of the convoy into two parts and is engaged in destroying one of the sections. (U. S. Army)

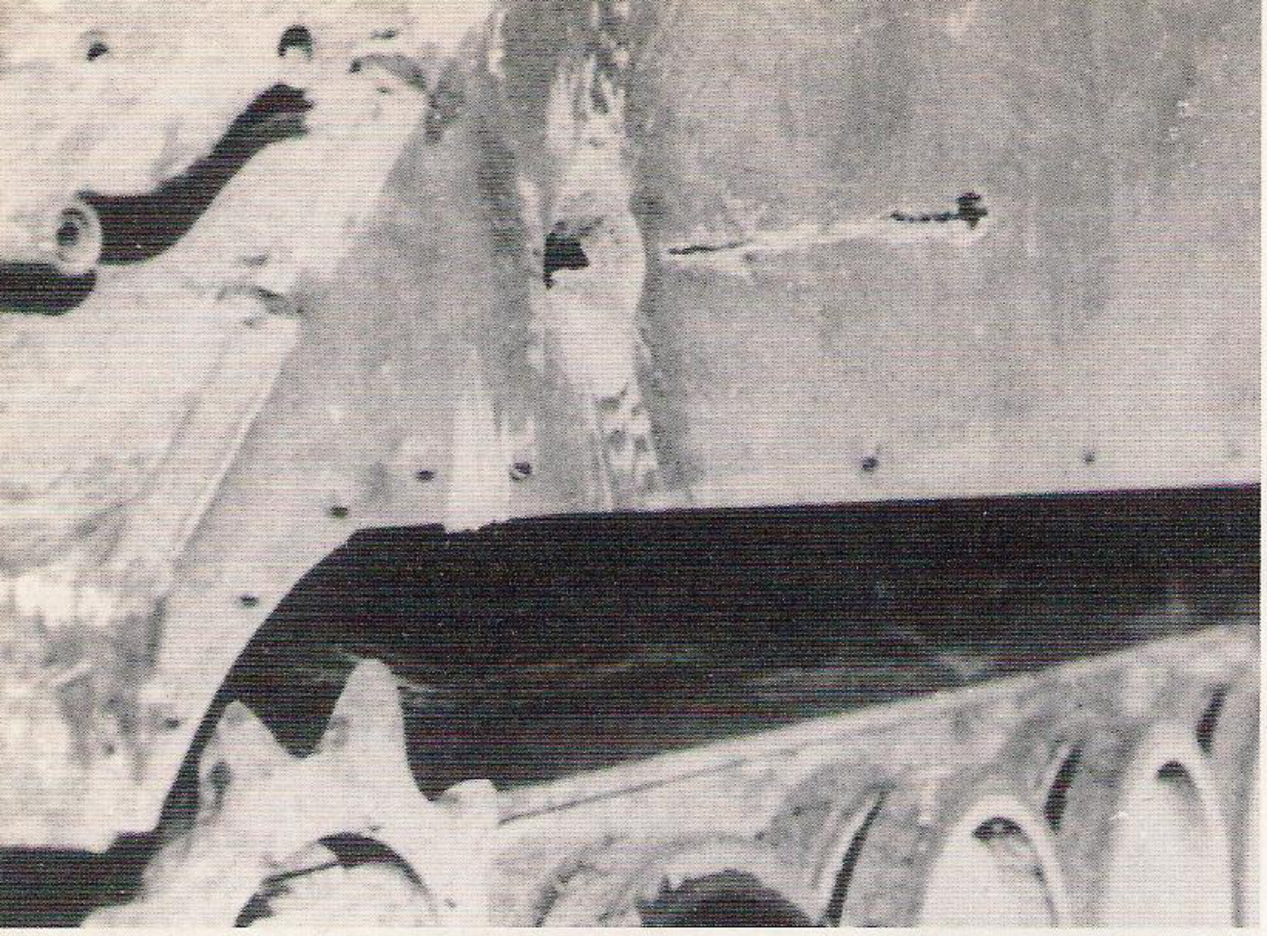


(Right) Two of the trucks in the convoy were hit by enemy automatic weapons fire and started to burn. (U. S. Army)

The arrival of American logistics and truck units around Saigon gave the Viet Cong a perfect target and convoy ambushes became widespread. At first they were only isolated instances, such as this 2 1/2 ton truck of the 87th Transportation Company, which was hit and destroyed in 1966. (Dennis Berg)

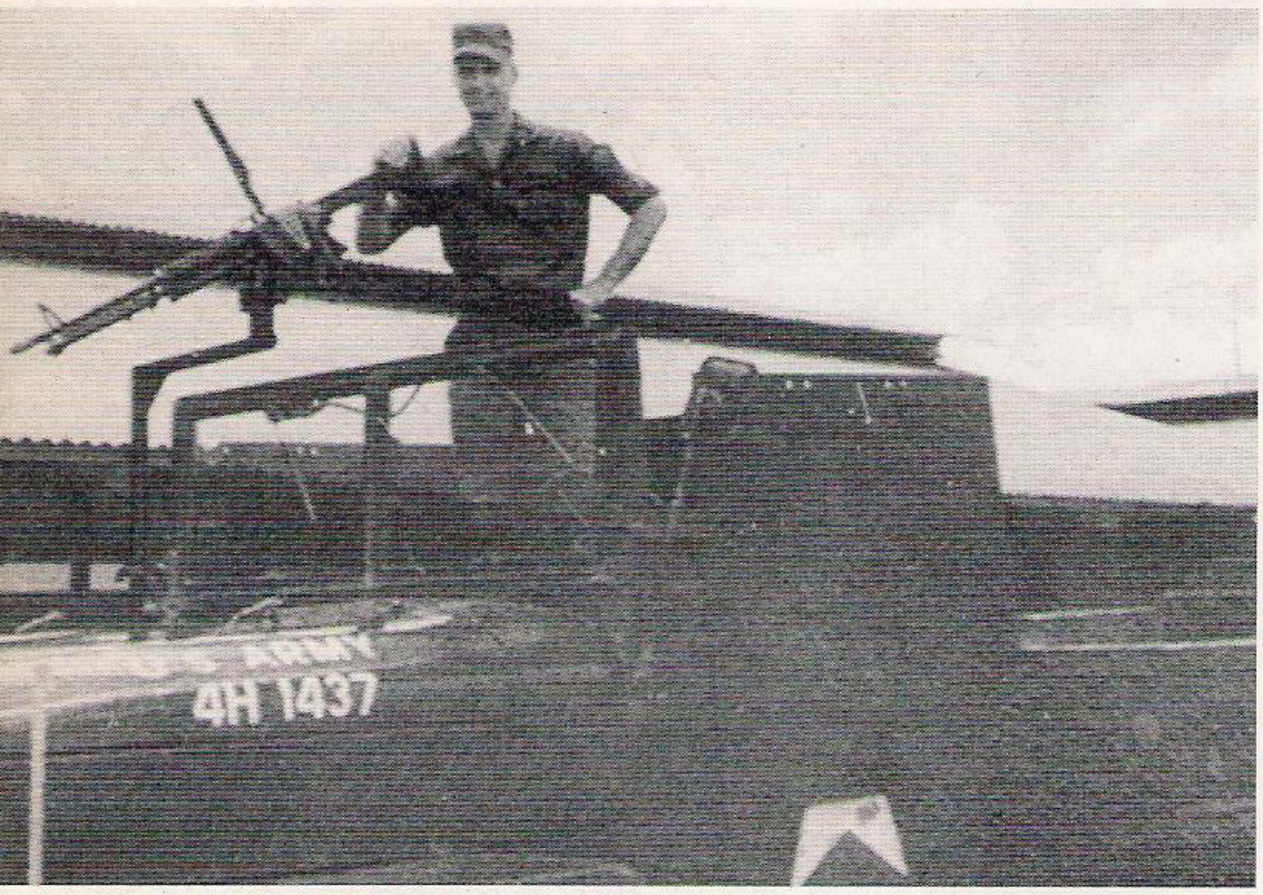
This truck was hit at point blank range and set on fire. The driver tried to get the vehicle off the road so the burning truck would not block the road for the vehicles behind him. (U. S. Army)





Even the M113 Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs), acting as convoy escorts, were hit. A Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) round did this damage to the drivers side of the vehicle. (U. S. Army)

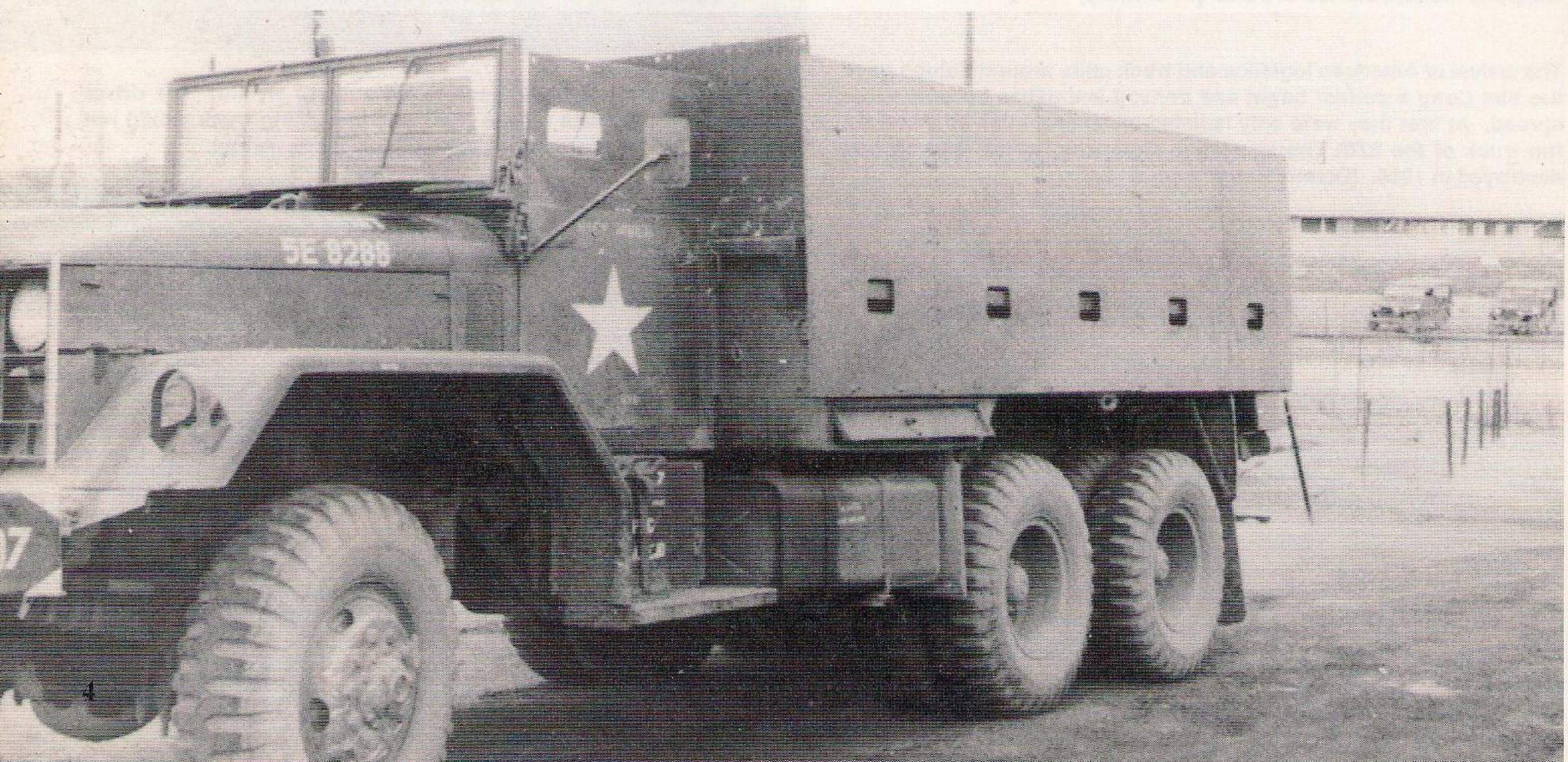
In self-defense, truck drivers soon began to arm and armor their trucks. This was an early attempt to provide convoy protection. The crew has mounted a 7.62MM M60 machine gun and added armor plates to the doors. (U.S. Army)



(Left) This was an early version of truck armor plating. This truck had the cargo bed armored, with gun slits in the sides and a position for a machine gun. (U.S. Army)

A rear view of an early armored truck reveals the inside armor arrangement and the mounts for the two machine guns. (U.S. Army)

Armor plating was soon added the sides of other vehicles. This truck has the entire cargo bed covered with armor plate with gun slits along the bottom. (U.S. Army)

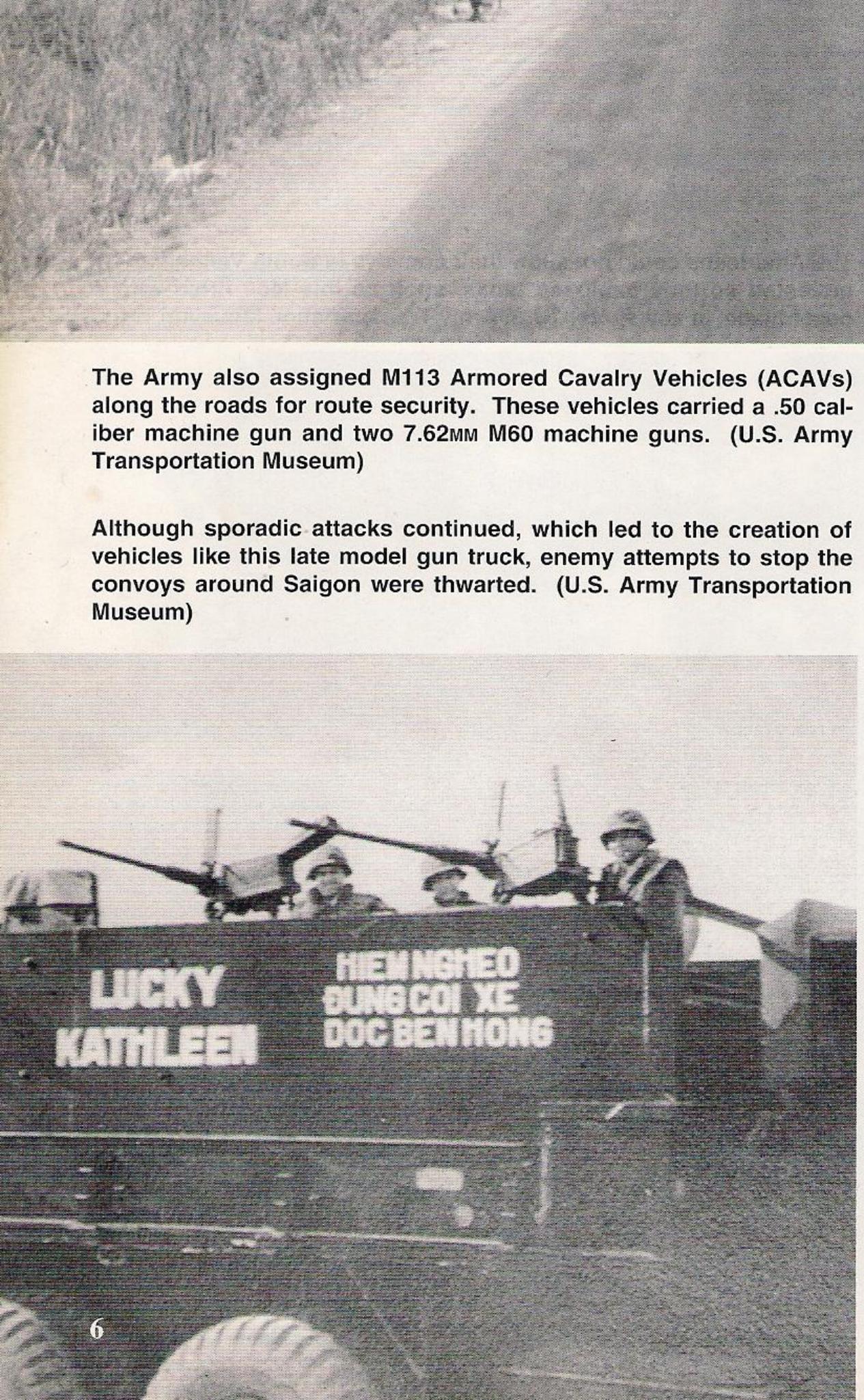


This early gun truck was used around Saigon. The truck had four panels of armor plate bolted to the frame with each plate being configured with gun slit. Sandbags were placed on the windshield and running boards to reduce the effects of blast and small arms fire. (U.S. Army)

The Americans could not allow their convoys in South Vietnam to be molested so they deployed tanks, such as this M60 fitted with a dozer blade, at key spots. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The Army also assigned M113 Armored Cavalry Vehicles (ACAVs) along the roads for route security. These vehicles carried a .50 caliber machine gun and two 7.62MM M60 machine guns. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Although sporadic attacks continued, which led to the creation of vehicles like this late model gun truck, enemy attempts to stop the convoys around Saigon were thwarted. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



the ambush. The Americans counted thirteen enemy dead and one wounded on the battlefield. It was just another in a long line of Viet Cong/NVA ambushes along Route 19 in the Central Highlands of Vietnam

The war in Vietnam is generally perceived as a war fought against an unseen enemy conducting hit and run raids from bases deep in the jungles or swamps. There were certainly jungles and swamps in Vietnam, however, there were also mountains, coastal plains and the rolling hills of the Central Highlands. In fact, because of the diversity of the terrain several different wars were fought in Vietnam. Soldiers who fought in the swamps of the Mekong Delta fought under different circumstances then the men of the First Air Cavalry who fought amid the hills and pine trees of the Central Highlands.

Nor did the enemy always choose to conduct hit and run attacks. In 1966 and 1968, for example, the North Vietnamese conducted several battalion and regimental-sized actions in various parts of Vietnam. They were all defeated, but they do represent the scope of operations that the war covered. Additionally, the battles weren't always fought by infantry or cavalry. The enemy quickly realized that Americans operating in the field required a lot of ammunition, food and supplies. In fact, during Vietnam, every infantryman in the field required the services of five or six support soldiers to keep him going. The number of supply personnel, cooks, mail clerks, engineers, truck drivers and others needed in Vietnam grew rapidly as the war progressed. These troops were usually specialists in their field, but had only rudimentary infantry skills. They made ideal targets for the enemy and if the enemy could cut off the support, the American infantryman would be defeated before any battles were fought.

In 1967, the Viet Cong launched one such operation. They attempted

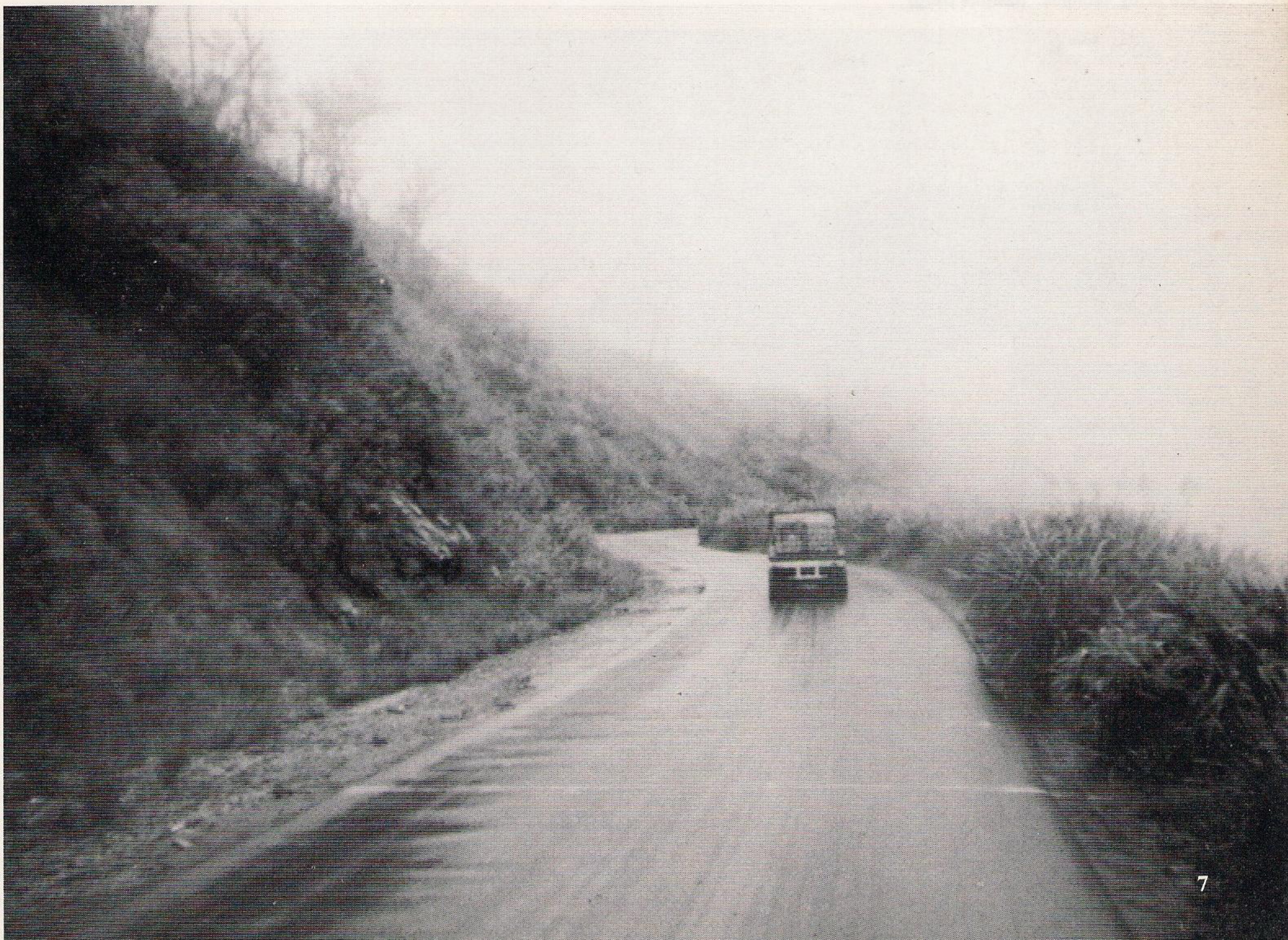
This convoy has reached its destination, a Special Forces camp site. The cargos carried by the vehicles were used to build the camp. The men in the "Tiger Stripe" uniforms are Special Forces advisers. (Dennis Berg)

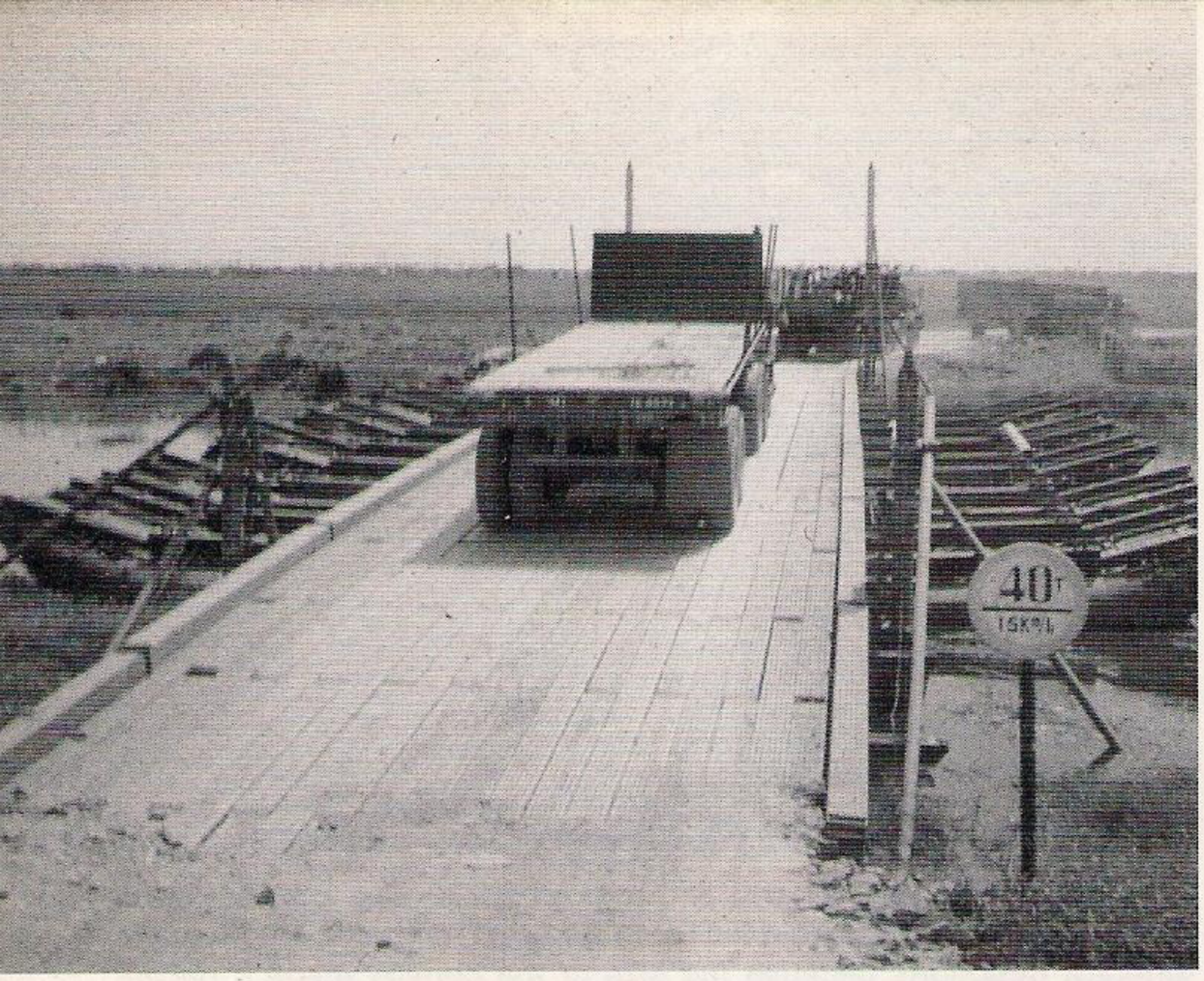
A truck convoy, loaded with all kinds of cargo and supplies, was being staged in preparation for moving out . The trucks are facing in different directions because the size of the convoy made it necessary to wind the vehicle lines in a serpentine manner to make sure each truck was in its proper place in line. All the windshields are lowered, a common practice for tactical convoys, to protect the drivers from flying glass in the event of a hit. (Dennis Berg)

to shut down Route 19 which ran from the coast to Pleiku in the Central Highlands. The Central Highlands are 20,000 square miles of sparsely populated plateau and hill region. It begins about fifty miles north of Saigon and extends across the center of Vietnam to a point roughly fifty miles south of Chu Lai. In the east it borders a narrow coastal plain and its western region is bordered by rugged mountains and thick jungle. The region also borders Cambodia in the west. It became a major entry point into South Vietnam for North Vietnamese troops using the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The Highlands had long been a major enemy stronghold. The Americans decided to challenge the enemy for control of the area.

Thus the battle lines were drawn. American units moved into the Highlands in force and the enemy reinforced his units. While the American combat units searched for the enemy, the American truck drivers of the 8th Transportation Group carried supplies and ammunition to the combat units. Massive truck convoys of seventy or more trucks trav-

A heavily loaded tractor trailor rig of the 8th Transportation Group strains to get up one of the many hills on Route 19. Foggy weather and the tight, hair-pin turns made the route an ideal ambush site. Route 19 became known to the men of the 8th as "Ambush Alley." (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)





A tractor-trailer rig crosses a pontoon bridge. These large rigs were capable of carrying huge loads of supplies and oversized equipment. Their major draw-back was that they were slow and vulnerable when fully loaded. (Dennis Berg)

A convoy commander's jeep. The vehicle carried a single 7.62MM M60 machine gun and was radio equipped (the whip antenna for the radio is visible just behind the commander's head). The vehicle was also heavily sandbagged . The crew all wear flak jackets for protection from small arms fire and shell splinters. (Dennis Berg)

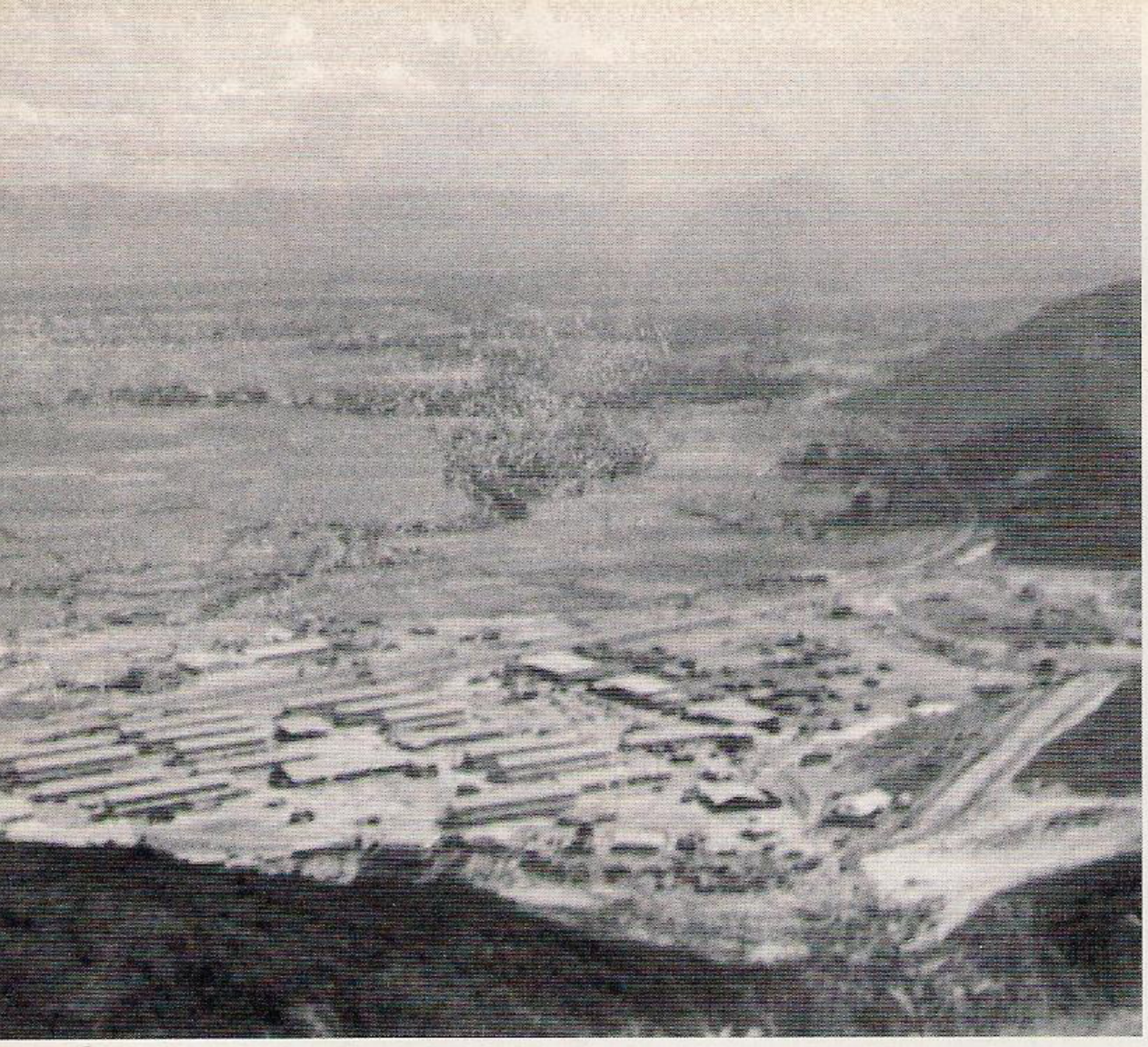
eled Route 19 on a daily basis to deliver supplies.

The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army soon discovered this inviting target. In September of 1967, they launched a campaign to close Route 19, the American's main supply route, and destroy the 8th Transportation Group. During the next year the Americans fought a long road war along Route 19 which rivals many of the great battles in our history. In the end American ingenuity and courage were the margin of victory.

Tractor-trailer rigs pull their heavy loads up a steep grade in the Central Highlands. The convoy has begun to string out due to the difference in speeds between the vehicles. This could be very dangerous. A convoy of civil vehicles has pulled over to clear the way for the Army vehicles. (Dennis Berg)

A group of truckers in South Vietnam. Most of the men assigned to the unit were seventeen to eighteen years old and fresh out of high school. They are dressed in the stanadard issue fatigues, which were soon replaced by jungle fatigues. (Dennis Berg)

A typical company area of a transportation unit in Vietnam. During the massive American build-up many units lived in tent cities until more permanent quarters could be built. (Dennis Berg)



The enemy soon found a new target when the 8th Transportation Group arrived in Vietnam. The Group set up camp at Qui Nhon and was tasked with providing support for the First Air Cavalry stationed at An Khe. It was an isolated area with only one road and many good ambush sites. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

8th Transportation Group

The 8th Transportation Group was formed on 9 December 1943, at Fort Lawton, Washington, with the original designation of 8th Traffic Regulation Group. After training in Washington, the group was transferred to the European Theater of Operations (ETO) where they served in Northern France and the Rhineland Campaigns. In June of 1946, they were deactivated at Rheims, France.

The unit was reactivated on 15 October 1949, and served with Army units in Germany throughout the 1950s.

In June of 1966, the 8th Transportation Group was stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, when they were notified of their impending movement to Vietnam. At the time of its deployment, the Group consisted of the 27th, 54th and 124th Truck Battalions.

This was the six mile stretch of road between Qui Nhon and An Khe that was the site of many ambushes of American truck convoys. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

After receiving its orders for deployment, the unit trained hard and by mid-September they were ready for war. On 24 September 1966, the unit boarded the USNS LEROY ELTINGE at Oakland, California, and set sail for Southeast Asia, arriving on 19 October 1966. Once in-country, they became part of the 5th Transportation Command and were assigned to Qui Nhon. The headquarters set-up its camp in the rolling Thanh Valley.

Order Of Battle:

8th Transportation Group

27th Transportation Battalion (Truck)

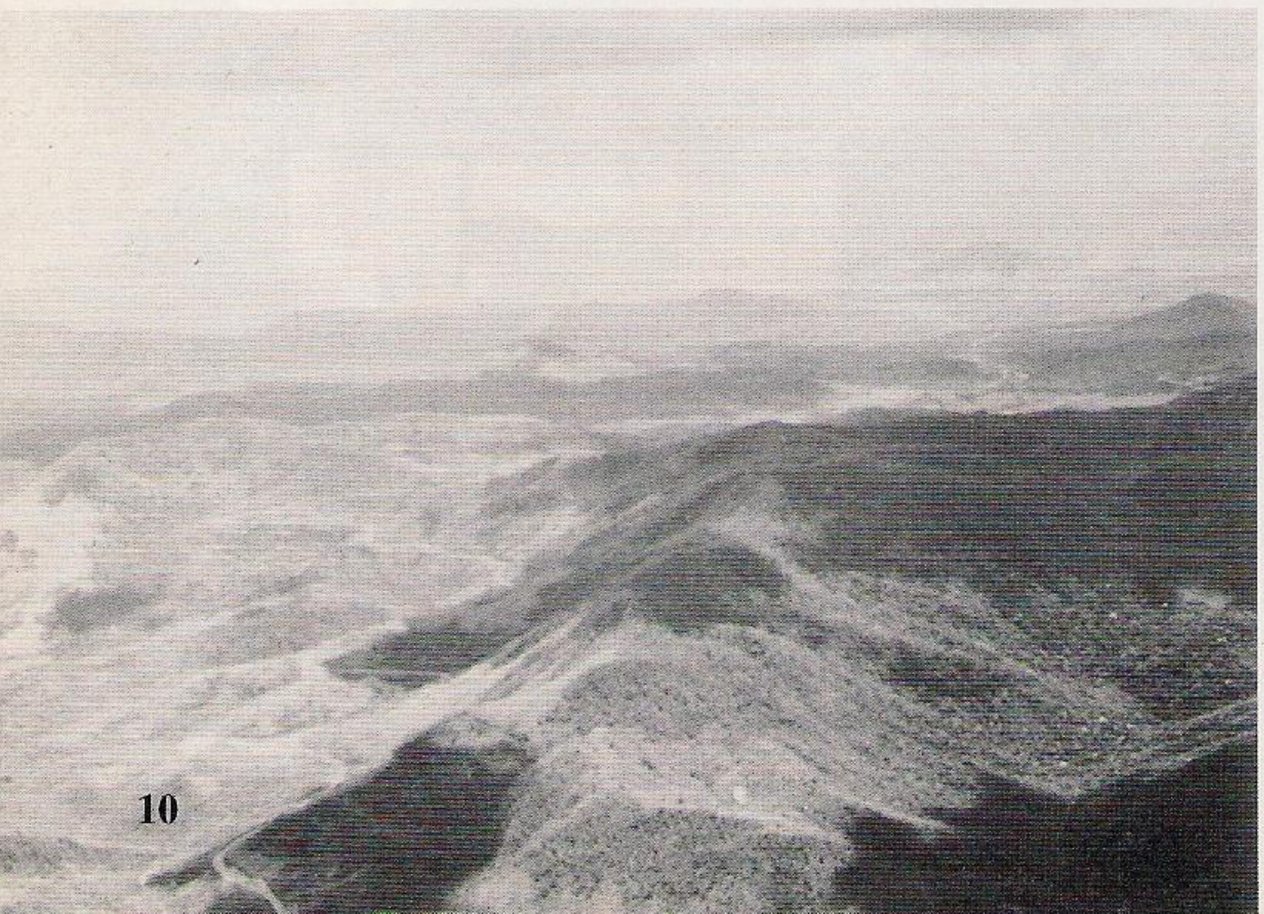
2nd Transportation Company (Med)
58th Transportation Company (Lt)
444th Transportation Company (Lt)
585th Transportation Company (Med)
597th Transportation Company (Med)
505th Transportation Detachment (TTP)

54th Transportation Battalion (Truck)

57th Transportation Company (Lt)

An Khe Pass was another ambush site favored by the VC and NVA. This was the view many enemy snipers and mortar crews had of the trucks winding their way up the pass. (U. S. Army Transportation Museum)

Mung Giang Pass was the other treacherous pass that the truck drivers were forced to negotiate. It was a steep three mile grade with heavy woods on both sides, an ideal ambush location for the VC and NVA. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



American units always required fuel. Although there was a fuel pipeline from Qui Nhon to An Khe, it was easily shut down by the enemy. Moving bulk fuel in a large tractor trailer was always a hazardous chore. The driver of *ROBERTA,* a truck from the 359th Transportation Company, has added armor plate to his cab for protection from snipers. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

512th Transportation Company (Lt)
523rd Transportation Company (Lt)
666th Transportation Company (Lt)
669th Transportation Company (Lt)

124th Transportation Battalion (Truck)

64th Transportation Company (Med)
88th Transportation Company (Lt)
541st Transportation Company (Lt)
563rd lTransportation Company (Med)
28th Transportation Platoon
520th Transportation Detachment (TTP)

All Transportation Battalions included the headquarters and headquarters detachments. Individual companies were designated as Light (Lt)

The big tractor trailers, such as the *Inez* of the 27th Transportation Battalion, were easy targets for enemy snipers. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

A convoy from the 27th Transportation Battalion form up at the convoy start point. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Almost immediately upon their arrival the Group began transporting cargo. An unprotected convoy of tractor-trailer trucks from the 27th Transportation Battalion moved through town. The trucks are loaded with fuel and are headed for An Khe. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Although these truckers are dressed jungle fatigues, they are still armed with the 7.62MM M14 rifle. (Dennis Berg)

A convoy moves along Route 19 toward An Khe pass in the distance. In this area, the wide open fields made enemy ambushes difficult to spot. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

At first the attacks came from enemy small arms. This is an array of enemy small arms captured by convoy security elements operating along Route 19. (Dick Gleason)

Before any convoy left the drivers were briefed on the convoy procedures, probability of enemy contact and other vital facts. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

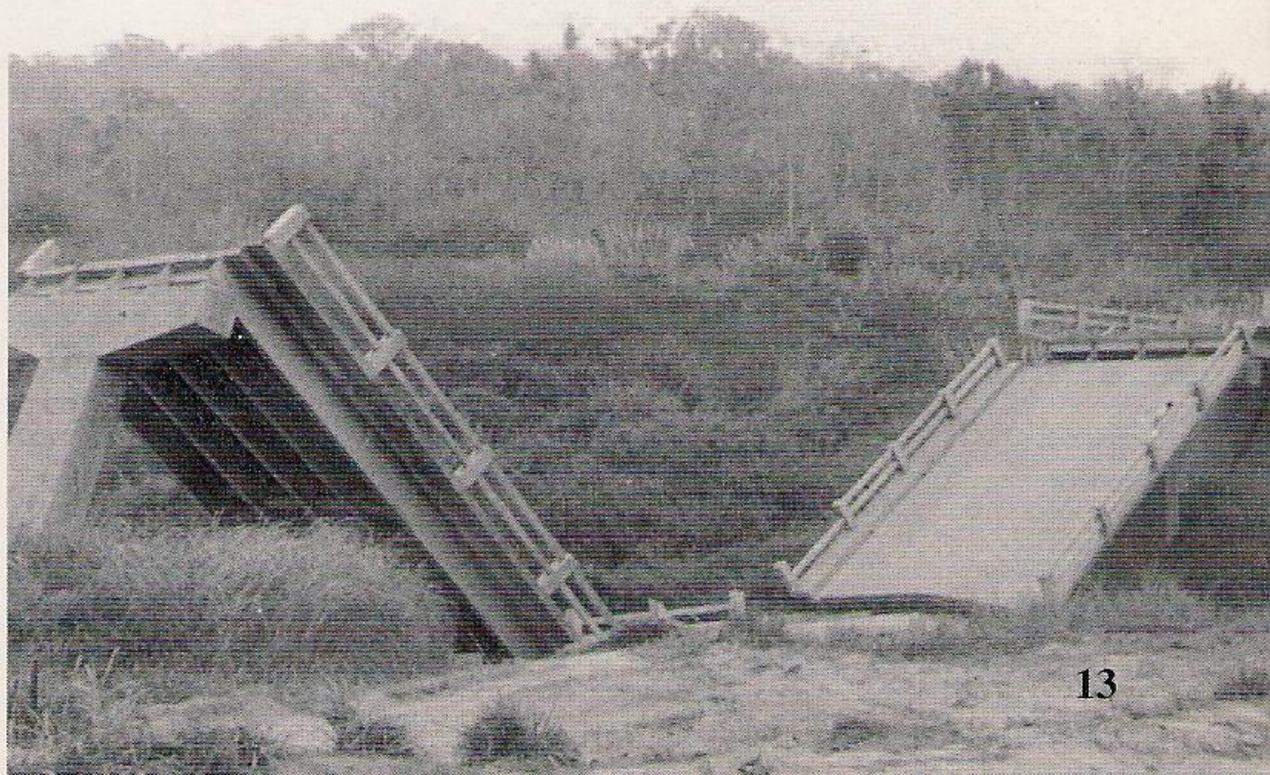
which operated 2 1/2 ton trucks and 5 ton, Medium (Med) which operated 5 ton trucks and trailer transfer points (TTP).

Normal Transportation Company Organization:

(1) Headquarters
(1) Maintenance platoon
(3) Truck platoons: each platoon had (2) squads

Equipment:

It did not take long for the enemy to find the 8th Transportation Brigade. The enemy blew this bridge along Route 19 in an effort to slow the resupply of units in the Central Highlands. (Dick Gleason)



The view from the lead jeep of the convoy. The enemy could appear anywhere along the road. Mines, machine guns and rockets were a constant worry. (Dick Gleason)

60-65 trucks and five jeeps per company

Each squad had ten trucks, the other trucks were maintenance and headquarters vehicles. Jeeps were at platoon or higher level. A number of M-37 1 3/4 ton trucks were also used in Vietnam.

Personnel:

Truck units were designed to operate around the clock and accordingly, they were staffed with sufficient people to accomplish that mission. The normal company had 220 men on its rolls.

Operations

After its arrival in Vietnam, the unit spent a few weeks getting acquainted with its mission and area of operations. The 8th operated as far north as Bon Song and far west as Pleiku and Dak To. This area presented some of the best and worst operational conditions in South Vietnam. The road net around Qhi Nhon was smooth macadam. The 8th, however, had to support the American and allied units throughout the Central Highlands and the roads were not as easy to travel. From Pleiku north to Kontum and Dak Son the truckers of the 8th traveled Highway 14. This route was unpaved, pot holed, narrow and crowded with civilian traffic.

Besides the roads, the truckers had to deal with the heat and with the Monsoon weather, which turned the unpaved roads into quagmires.

Their first stop to the west was An Khe. It was fifty miles from Qhi

Civilian buses and other traffic bunched up the convoys and made them easier targets for the enemy. (Dick Gleason)

Sometime the civilian drivers were a worse hazard than the enemy. Narrow roads and a unique Vietnamese approach to driving often made navigating through towns and villages a nerve racking experience for American drivers. (Dick Gleason)

Nhon and the route covered some of the worse terrain on earth. Highway 19 was the only major hard surfaced highway which led from Qhi Nhon to An Khe and points further west. As the road climbed west into the Central Highlands, it crossed through An Khe Pass. The pass was a series of climbing five miles hairpin turns and trucks carrying heavy loads often had great difficulty negotiating the long climb. Once through the pass, the road descended down into An Khe and the 1st Cavalry Divisions base camp. After An Khe, the next stop was Pleiku which was fifty-nine miles to the west. Outside An Khe the road began to climb again into Mang Giang Pass. This pass was another two miles of winding, torturous, climbing roadway. Once through Mang Giang Pass the road drops down and enters Pleiku. Most of the trucks unloaded in the provincial capital. A small number of trucks with supplies for Dak To continued north after a brief rest in Pleiku.

From October of 1966, through August of 1967, the 8th Group had a fairly quiet time. Their support of the infantry units grew as more of their companies became operational. Soon the truck units were setting resupply milestones of unheard of proportions. In order to supply the troops in their area of operations, the 8th Group moved 3,000 tons of supplies per day and covered over 1,000,000 miles per month. Over 600 transporters operated some 450 vehicles a day in convoy operations to move this massive mountain of supplies. The unit carried food, fuel, ammunition, lumber, clothes and any other commodities or supplies needed by the infantry to carry on the war. Most of these supplies went to the First Air Cavalry Division. This period of fairly peaceful trips ended in late September.

The enemy soon increased the attacks on Route 19, using heavier weapons. Units in platoon-strength and larger attacked the convoys. These different types of enemy machine guns were captured after enemy ambushes. (Dick Gleason)

Initial convoy protection was provided by M151 jeeps mounting a single 7.62MM M60 machine gun. Although helpful, these vehicles were too lightly armed and had little protection for their crews in an ambush. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

It was late in the day on 2 September 1967, as thirty-nine vehicles of the 8th Transportation Group departed Pleiku on their return trip to Qui Nhon. The trucks of the convoy were empty, having delivered their loads to the First Cavalry Division and other American units in Pleiku earlier in the day. The 100 mile return trip along Route 19 was long, but everyone in the convoy hoped it would be uneventful. The convoy had passed over this same route earlier in the morning with no difficulty. The run back held all the possibilities of being an even easier affair. In Vietnam, however, it never paid to relax.

At 1855, the convoy was approximately ten miles east of Mang Giang Pass and six miles west of An Khe. A 5,000 gallon fuel tanker, located near the end of the convoy, was having trouble keeping up and had effectively split the convoy into two sections and there was already a

Commanders even tried adding extra fire power to the escorting jeeps. This M151 Mutt carried two 7.62MM M60 machine guns on a twin mount. The weight of guns, ammunition and crew weighed the vehicle down. The rear of this vehicle is almost resting on the rear wheel. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Armored vehicles were even integrated into convoys at times, although there were too few vehicles and they moved much to slowly. This armored vehicle and its crew is on patrol out in front of a convoy. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Infantry units sometimes accompanied convoys and were used as reaction forces. Other infantry units patrolled likely ambush spots. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

500 meter gap between the two elements of the convoy. The convoy commander was concerned, since he only had two M151 jeeps armed with 7.62MM M60 machine guns for convoy protection and if the convoy got split-up these vehicles would not be able to support one another in the event of an attack.

With no warning, the enemy sprang their ambush, opening up with 57MM recoilless rifles and a hail of small arms fire. A recoilless rifle round slammed into the lead M151 jeep instantly killing one man and wounding two others. At that moment some twenty-nine five-ton trucks

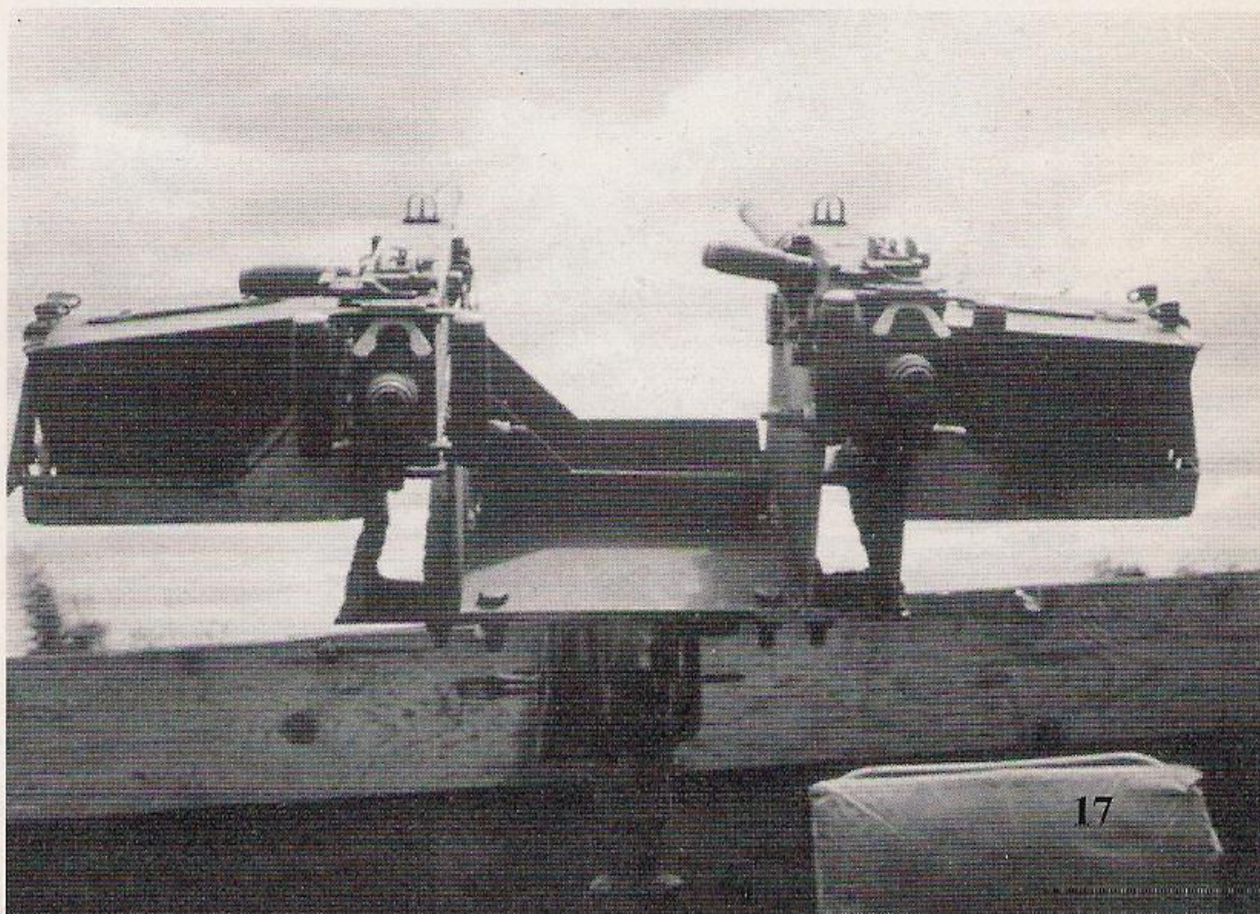
This was an unusual early gun truck, with slanted armor and double wall construction. It mounts M60 machine guns on the sides and an M2 .50 caliber machine gun over the cab. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

THE GAMBLERS **was an early gun truck built from a 2 1/2 ton of the 27th Transportation Battalion. The M-35 retains its original ring mount and M2 .50 caliber machine gun on the passengers side of the cab. A thin sheet of low armor plating has been added to each side and the rear. Two 7.62MM M60 machine gun mounts have been fabricated and added to allow the gunners to shoot to either side. Rifle slits were retained in the side armor for crew protection. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)**

BORN LOSER is another early version of the gun truck. This truck, from the 58th Transportation Battalion mounts a single sheet of armor plating with rifle slits. The armament has been upgrade to an M2 .50 caliber machine gun in the front, another in the rear and two side firing M60 machine guns. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Occasionally even outdated 3/4 ton utility vehicles were pressed into service, modified with armor and automatic weapons. Although this vehicle of the 27th Transportation Battalion was used mainly for administrative duties, some identical vehicles were used as convoy escorts. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

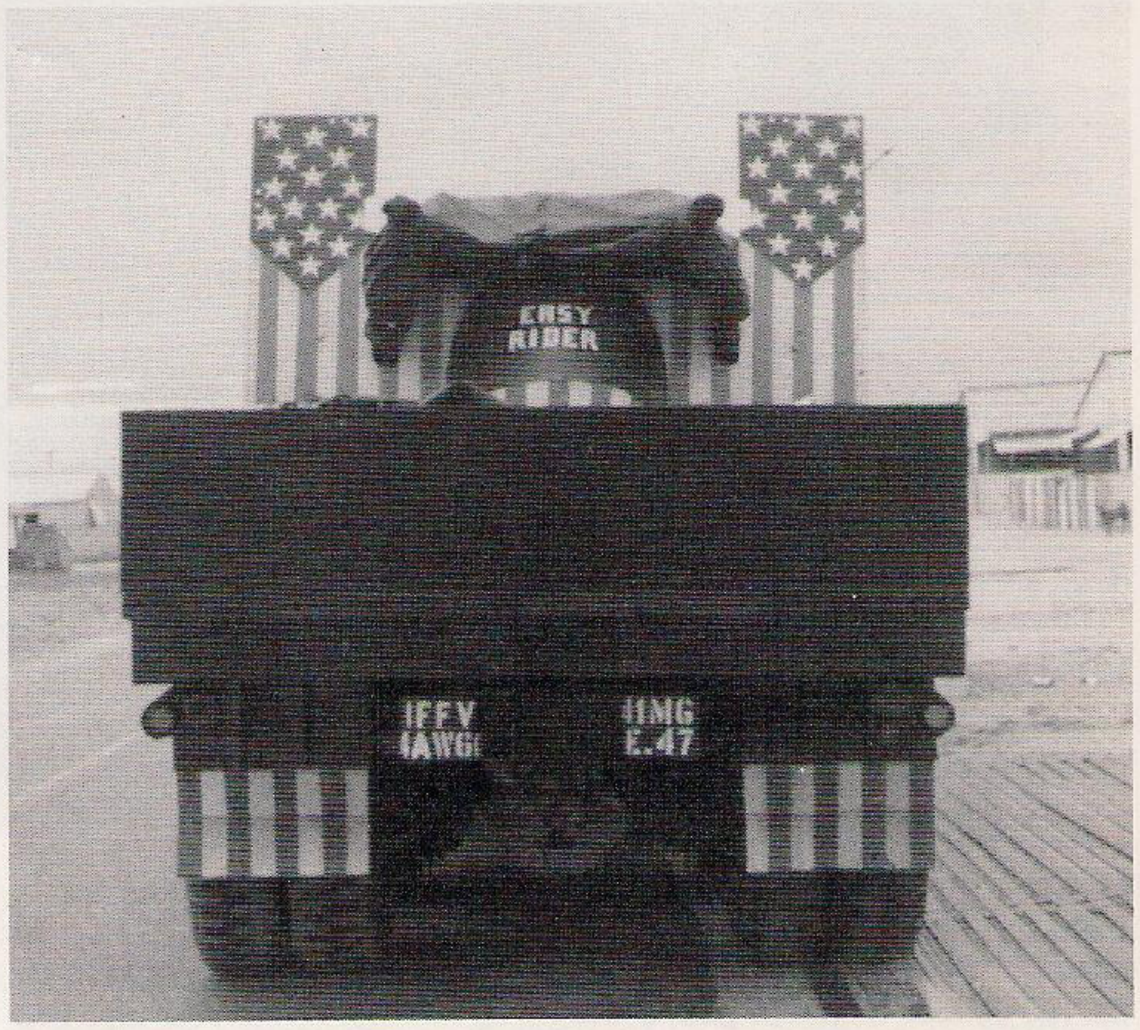
As enemy activity increased more and more gun trucks were constructed. This was one of the locally fabricated twin M2 .50 caliber machine gun mounts used on many gun truck conversions. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



(Above & Left) One of the first quad-.50 caliber machine gun trucks used by the 8th Transportation Group. *NANCY* belonged to the 444th Transportation Company and was a powerful anti-ambush weapon. The quad .50 caliber mount was the same anti-aircraft mount used on the Second World War M16 half track anti-aircraft vehicle. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

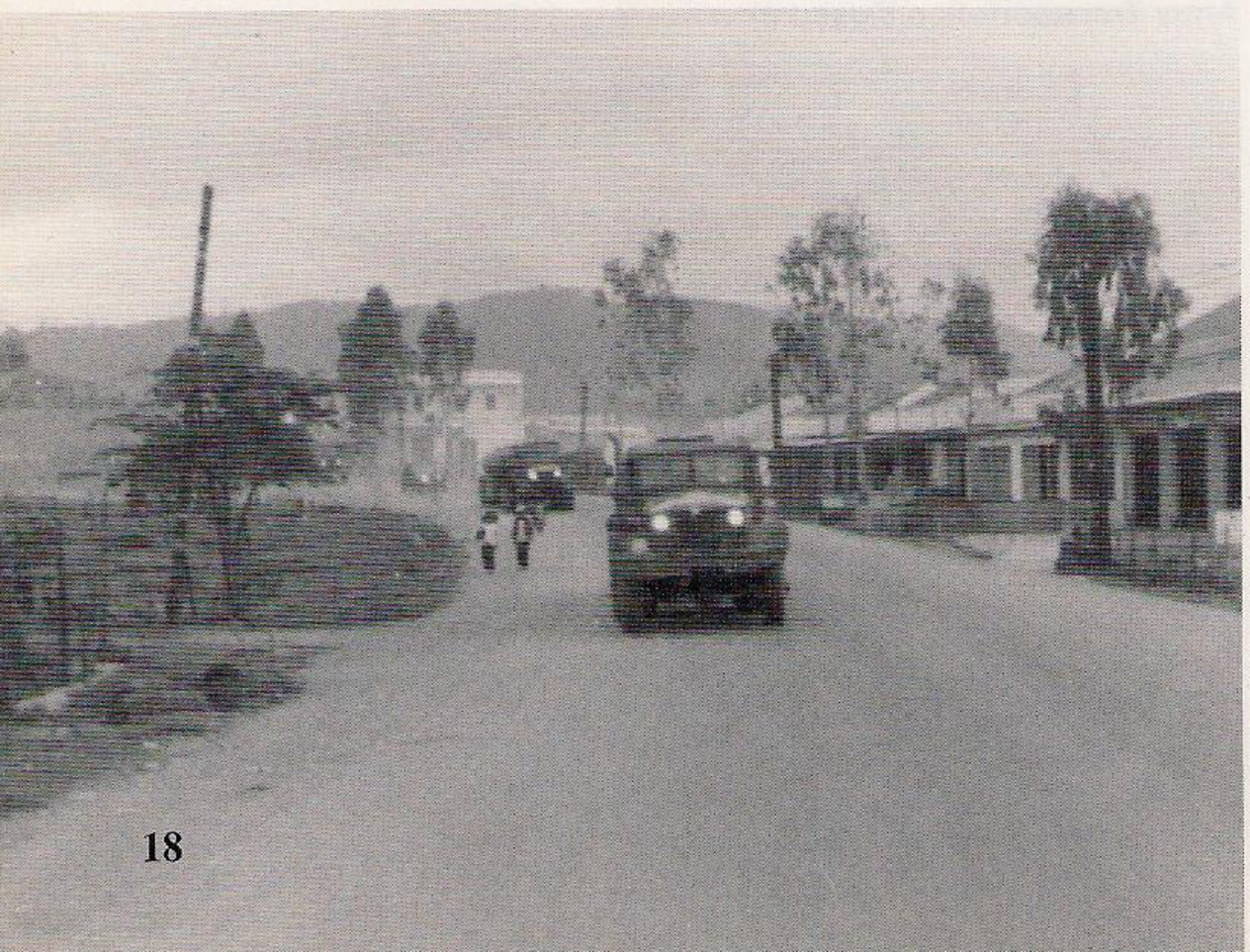
EASY RIDER was a M55 quad M2 .50 caliber machine gun truck of Battery E, 41st Artillery Battalion. She was painted like an American Flag with Red and White stripes and White stars on a Blue field. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

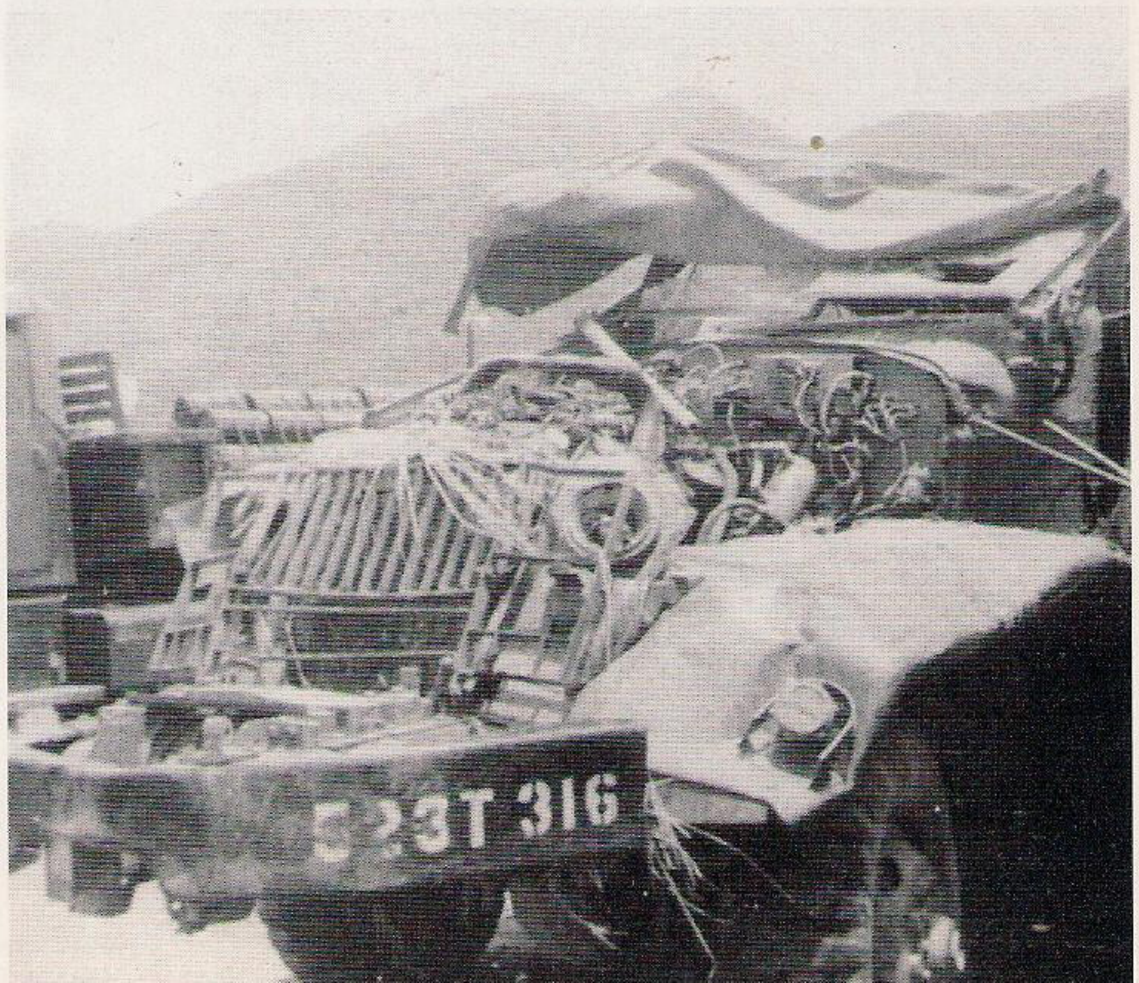
A convoy of the 8th Transportation Group moves out. Even with the early gun trucks in support, convoys remained a dangerous duty. Big, slow, heavily loaded trucks were an easy target for any group of VC or NVA. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



Ambushes and accidents took their toll. This destroyed truck was from the 523rd Transportation Company, 54th Transportation Battalion, 8th Transportation Group. (Merrill Longamore)

A convoy of trucks from the 8th Group rumbles through a village. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)





SNOOPY, of the 27th Transportation Battalion, 444th Transportation Company, was outfitted with cut down armor for better visibility and improved fields of fire. The driver had removed the canvas top over the cab in expectation of enemy action. Often times, uncommitted gun trucks would roll to support a convoy under attack. If alerted, the gunners would mount to their machine guns and the truck was ready to fight. The II above the name probably indicates *SNOOPY* was probably rebuilt at least once. **(U.S. Army Transportation Museum)**

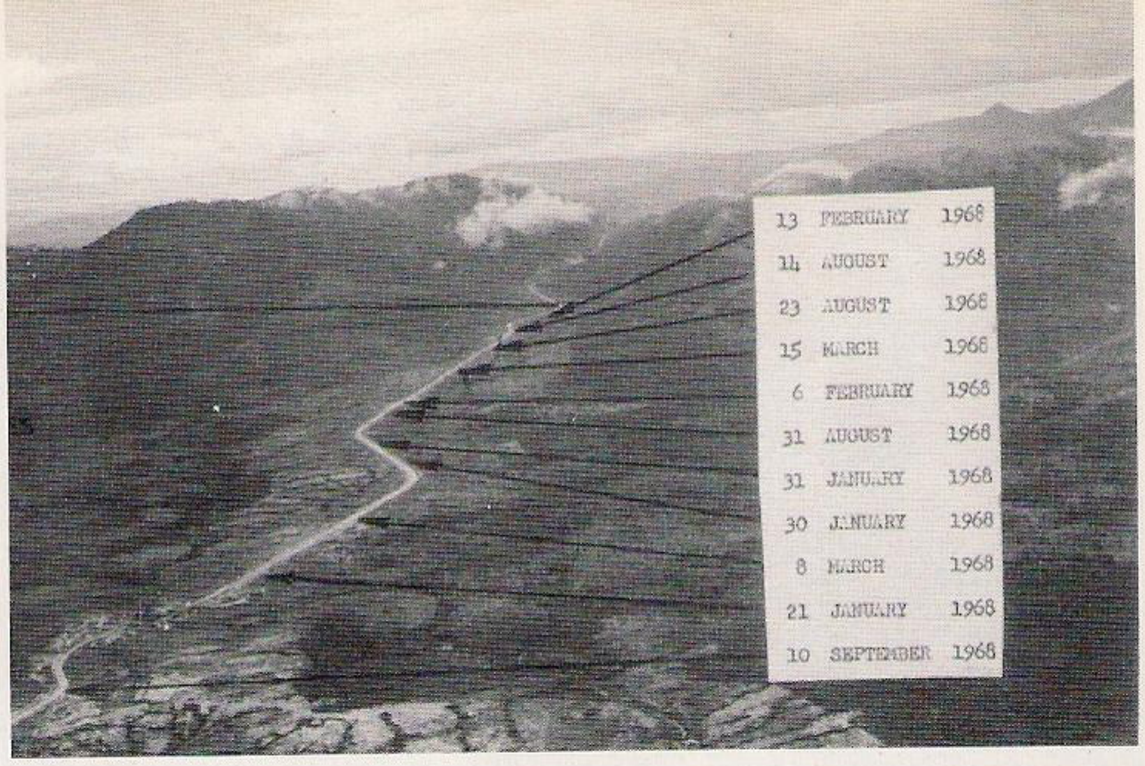
THE ASSASSIN! carried unusual slanted armor and two single mounted M60 machine guns. **(U.S. Army Transportation Museum)**

were caught in a 700 meter long ambush. The enemy, estimated to be an infantry company, was hidden in the tree line on the south side of the road, and poured rifle and machine gun into the trucks. In a matter of minutes the second, third and fourth vehicles in the line were disabled by recoilless rifle fire or command detonated mines. The enemy did not forget the second part of the convoy. Almost simultaneously with the attack on the main part of the convoy, enemy 57MM recoilless rifle gunners scored a direct hit on the 5,000 gallon refueler.

The truck drivers dove for cover along side the road and tried to return fire with their individual weapons, but they were too disorganized and the enemy was too strong. All the battered Americans could do was take cover and call for help.

Fortunately for the truck drivers a company of the First Cavalry Division was stationed nearby. In the gathering darkness A/1/7 Cav,

Two crewman pose by the *Iron Butterfly*. This truck mounted four single M2 .50 caliber machine guns, one firing to each side, one firing forward and one mounted to fire to the rear. Many of the names of the gun trucks were taken from popular songs and rock groups of the 1960s. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



This is an annotated picture of Ambush Alley, a three mile stretch of road approaching the Mang Giang Pass, listing the dates and locations of the enemy ambushes. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

(Left) There were a great many great places to spring an ambush along the narrow, twisting road net in the central highlands. As the trucks made the long climb into the hills, they had to slow to the speed of the heaviest, slowest truck in the convoy. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

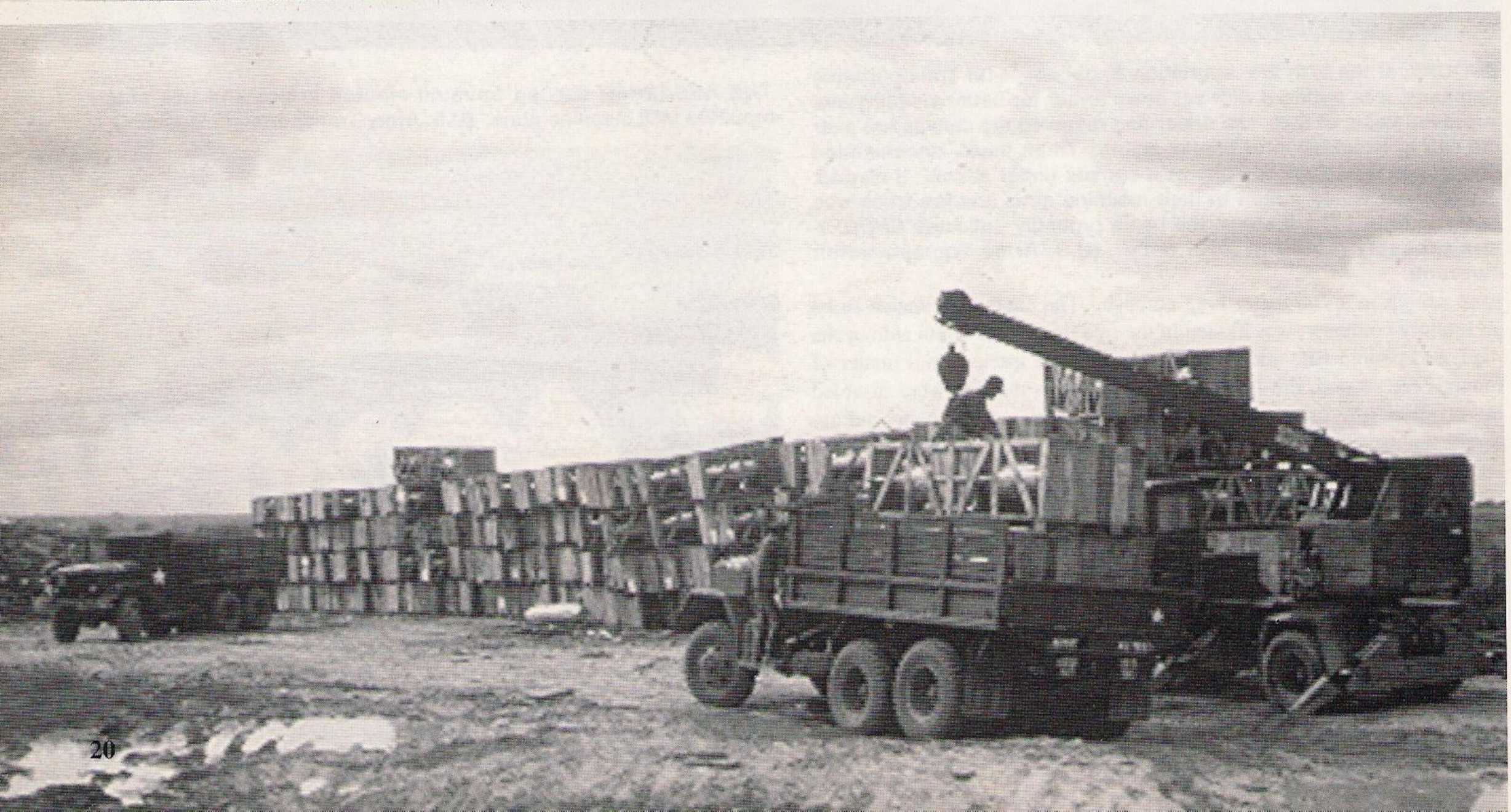
located less than a mile east of the ambush site, boarded their helicopters and headed out to help their comrades. It took them fifteen minutes to reach the ambush and by the time they arrived, it was all over. The enemy had melted back into the jungle.

Artillery and helicopter gunships sprayed the wood line with machine gun fire and an hour later an AC-47 Spooky gunship arrived on the scene to add its Miniguns to the effort.

The enemy troops, however, were long gone. The Americans had lost seventeen killed and seventeen wounded. In addition, thirty vehicles were either damaged or destroyed. No enemy casualties were found. Without the loss of a single man, the enemy, thought to be North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars had virtually wiped out an American convoy. It was a grim day for the men of the 8th Transportation Group.

The ambush along Highway 19 should not have come as a surprise to the Americans. The Viet Minh, predecessors to the Viet Cong, had suc-

Convoy loading areas were often very primitive. This M35 deuce and a half truck is being loaded with the assistance of a mobile crane. (Dennis Berg)



cessfully destroyed an entire French unit called Mobile 100 on this same road. The Viet Minh had launched a series of vicious ambushes against the road bound Mobile 100 and, in a six month period, the Viet Minh all but destroyed the unit. The final ambush was on Route 19 less than thirty kilometers from Pleiku. With Route 19 having such a rich battle history for the Viet Minh there was little wonder that the Viet Cong chose it as their area of operations some thirteen years later.

The Americans were oblivious to the history of the route. All the drivers knew was that the war was heating-up and they were becoming targets. If these convoys were going to continue along Route 19, they were going to need a different form of protection and better tactics.

The officers of the 8th analyzed the pattern of enemy activity and devised procedures to minimize the effects of an unexpected attack on a moving convoy.

They realized that, although an ambush might come at any time, late afternoon and early evening were the most likely periods for an ambush. Generally, the VC and NVA planned their attacks for areas that were

A M42 Duster dual 40MM anti-aircraft vehicles moves through a Vietnamese village. A number of these vehicles from the 4th Battalion, 60th Artillery (Automatic Weapons, Self-propelled) were assigned to the 8th Transportation Group. They were mainly used in the base security role. (via Jim Mesko)

With the name *BAD DREAM* written on the back as a warning to the enemy, a gun truck of the 541st Transportation Company, 124th Battalion rolls down the road. It is equipped with two 7.62MM M60s, one on either side and a single Browning M2 .50 caliber heavy machine gun in the rear. The protrusion on the end of the M2 is a night flash suppressor. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

***MACHO* was a M 54 5-ton truck armed with three M2 .50 caliber machine guns, one firing forward and one firing to either side. The turbo charger clamps, rear view mirrors and other tie downs were all painted White. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)**

sparsely populated, with heavy foliage and usually in a section of road that contained a rise, bend or a turn in the road. The rise or bend hid the action from the following trucks. The initial attack often takes the form of a command detonated mine which stopped the lead vehicle, blocking the road. Then automatic weapons fire was concentrated on the vehicles within the ambush kill zone.

The 8th devised the following rules for drivers:

Before an ambush:

--Be alert for changes in familiar scenes along the route

--Expect an ambush upon the detonation of mines, automatic weapons fire, or heavy sniper fire.

During an ambush:

--Continue moving, maintain interval.

--Follow in the tracks of the vehicle ahead to prevent further detonation of road mines.

--If disabled, steer off the road to permit the passage of others. Dismount and mount a passing vehicle.

--Avoid entering the kill zone.

After an ambush:

--Protect and care for wounded personnel, evacuate them as soon as possible.

--Reopen roadway, assure that the roadway is mine free.

--Contact EOD to remove any mines encountered.

Even the Engineer Battalion that supported the 8th Transportation Group built a gun truck. This was an armored M51 5-ton dump truck which was armed with two single M2 .50 caliber machine guns on either side of the bed. The engineer units were often assigned to sweep the road before the convoy and were also targets of ambushes and snipers. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Despite the appearance of the heavily armed gun trucks, VC and NVA ambushes continued. This gun jeep from the 8th Transportation Group was destroyed in an ambush. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Convoy security was initially provided by armed escort jeeps. These vehicles carried a 7.62MM M60 machine gun on a pedestal mount, a radio and a M79 40MM grenade launcher. The planned ratio of gun jeeps to trucks was to be one per every ten trucks, however, there were

This gun truck was severely damaged during an ambush, taking a hit or hits in the drivers compartment. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The drivers compartment of a destroyed cargo truck. From the damage, it is doubtful that the driver survived. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

never enough jeeps to meet this ratio. It quickly became apparent that the escort jeeps were too lightly armed to be effective against a serious ambush and even the quickest reaction forces took several minutes to arrive on scene. In that few minutes, the enemy could destroy a convoy

This M-54 5-ton was an early version gun truck with single M2 .50 caliber machine guns mounted at the front and rear, and a M60 over the passenger position for added protection. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Duty with the 8th Transportation Group was exhausting. Drivers and gun truck machine gunners were often on the road twelve to fourteen hours a day. Crewmen learned to live in their trucks. A gun truck crewman takes a smoke break while the convoy assembles, he is wearing a helmet, short sleeve T-shirt and a flak jacket, standard uniform for gun truck machine gunners. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

and be long gone. The truckers needed vehicles that could ride along with the convoy, offer their crews protection from the automatic weapons fire of an ambush and carry enough machine guns and ammunition of its own to defend the convoy if it were attacked. The obvious choice was an armored vehicle like a tank or an armored personnel carrier. There were, however, very few of these in-country and most of them were engaged in other operations. If the men of the 8th Transportation Group wanted protection for their convoys, they would have to build it themselves.

Of course, the Army had made no provisions for arming Transportation Groups for what would be basically offensive operations. The control of machine guns and other heavy weapons was strictly controlled by the Army's Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E).

The strain and dirt of convoy duty show on this gun truck Sergeant as he mans his M2 .50 caliber machine gun. He was equipped with a tanker's helmet with a built in radio head-set and mike. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

A young machine gunner on a double walled gun truck mans his M2 .50 caliber machine gun. Despite the long hours on the road and the constant danger of ambush, the moral of the gun truck crews remained amazingly high. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The military also frowned on modifying the trucks. All military equipment was built to exacting standards and designed for a specific mission. Altering the trucks by adding armor and multiple machine guns might throw off the specifications and destroy truck components, such as the suspension. That was the official Army position.

The official position held little sway in the 8th's base camp at Qhi Nhon. Men's lives were on the line and the difference between life and death was the ability of the American truckers to build a gun truck. This would have been a daunting task for the soldiers of many nations. For the young American soldiers of the 8th Transportation Group it was simply a matter of applying American ingenuity to the task at hand.

Within days, armor plate, scrounged from various sources, began to appear on the doors and floors of convoy vehicles. This modification was designed to protect the drivers and crews of the trucks from small arms fire and mines. It assured their safety during the vital first few seconds of an ambush and allowed them to bring their individual weapons to bear on the enemy.

On 13 November, fifteen enemy soldiers attacked a convoy belonging to the 27th Transportation Battalion, 585th Transportation Company. The 585th had armored one of its trucks and this vehicle was riding in the convoy. The truck did not have any machine guns mounted on it, but it did provide the truck drivers who were riding in the armored bed protection while firing their individual weapons. As luck would have it, the armor-platted truck was in the ambushes' "kill zone", the main part of the ambush, when the enemy attacked. The North Vietnamese fired over 100 rounds at the truck, but failed to do much damage. The enemy's attention on the armored truck gave the rest of the truck drivers precious seconds to take cover, get to their rifles and open fire on the ambushers. The enemy had unknowingly attacked one of the first vehicles to receive unofficial armor plate. Frustrated by the lack of damage, the enemy retreated, leaving the rest of the convoy unharmed. It was obvious to all of the American soldiers that they were on the right track. This enemy attack proved that armored trucks could survive the devastating automatic weapons fire of an ambush. The Americans, however, also discovered that individual rifles were not enough firepower to drive the enemy out of an ambush site. If the trucks were going to survive they needed machine guns and lots of them. It did not take long for the ingenious and innovative American soldiers to merge the ideas of armor plating and heavy fire power.

The commanding officer of the 8th Transportation Group was Colonel Joe O. Bellino. A down to earth, common sense commander, he realized the implications of the ambush and the possibilities of creating the gun truck to combat them. At some point in late October of 1967, one of his Maintenance Officers suggested that the group put armor and machine guns on the few of the trucks and send them along with the convoy as security vehicles. Without hesitation, Colonel Bellino gave his approval to the idea and the Hardened Convoy Concept was officially born. Armor plating was easier to find than machine guns and the early trucks had more armor than guns.

The 8th Group had machine gun assigned to them, but there were not

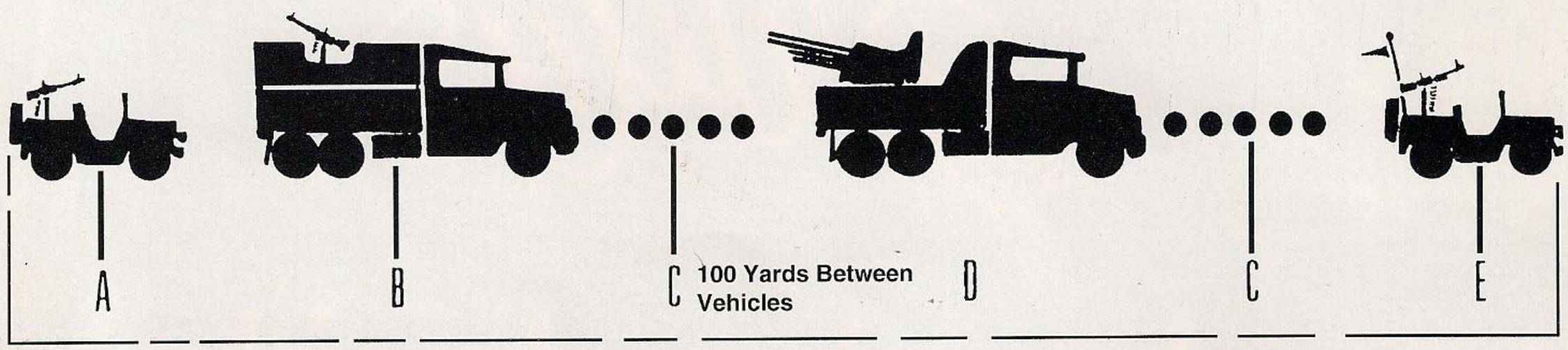
The lonely part of gun truck duty. *Brutus* sits alone in the company motor pool while the crew pulls maintenance on the vehicle to make it ready for the next convoy escort. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

(Right) From the rear, it is clear that the twin .50 caliber gun mount has a wide field of fire. *Brutus* was one of the more innovative paint jobs that flourished on many of these trucks. Although, they may appear gaudy, they are indicative of the time the drivers spent taking care of their trucks. The company name, lettering and stripes on the mud flaps were in Orange. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Brutus, an M54 5-ton truck of the 359th Transportation Company, 8th Transportation Group, had an interesting armor arrangement. It appears that some sort of large steel box has been modified to fit on the back of the truck. The truck mounts two single M2 .50 caliber machine guns firing to the sides and a set of twin mounted M2 .50 caliber machine guns firing to the rear. The name was in Orange. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

As the gun trucks became more numerous the enemy ambush tactics changed to include heavier weapons. Captured M2 .50 caliber machine guns, .30 caliber machine guns and mortars were used against the convoys. (Dick Gleason)

enough to go around. A transportation company normal had fourteen to sixteen machine guns assigned for base camp protection. As such, perimeter defense took most of the guns and the constant convoys required others for the escort jeeps. Certainly, some of the machine guns were made available for gun truck conversions, but the number available would not be nearly enough. There was, however, another solution. The truckers delivered supplies to the infantry on a daily basis. On their return trip they were often tasked with carrying damaged or destroyed infantry equipment back to the port at Qhi Nhon. The Army looked at each piece of equipment in terms of its total cost. If the cost to repair a damaged piece of equipment was greater than 50% or so of the total cost, the equipment was listed as not economically repairable and shipped back to the United States for disposal. In the heat of combat many machine guns were damaged or destroyed by the infantry. When the truckers found these weapons in their returning cargo, they simply stripped them of their working parts. Often it took the pieces from three or four damaged machine guns to make up one that worked, but it did not take long for the men of the 8th Group to establish a steady supply



Hardened Convoy Concept

A: Gun Jeep With Radio
B: Gun Truck With Radio
C: Task Vehicles
D: Quad-.50 Gun Truck With Radio
E: Gun Jeep With Radio

UNCLE MEAT and _THE EVE OF DESTRUCTION_ sit side by side in the 8th Transportation Group motor pool. Both were M54 5-ton gun trucks and were assigned to the 124th Transportation Battalion. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

of rebuilt machine guns and a sizable inventory of salvaged repair parts.

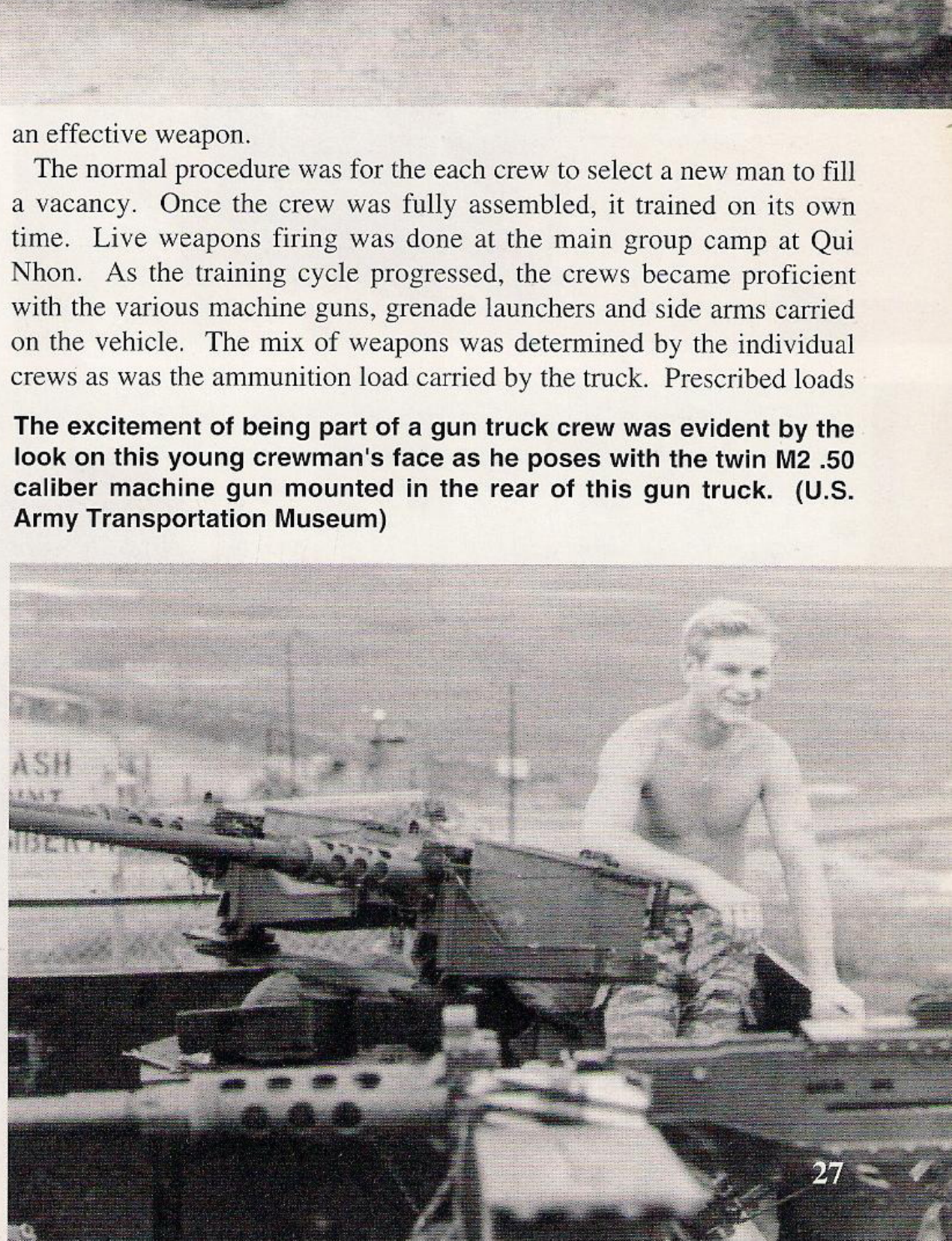
Within a matter of a few weeks the 8th Group had begun converting some of its standard cargo trucks to gun trucks. At first, the trucks were simply built by the individual units within the group. One or two cargo trucks from each company were pulled off the line and given armor plate and weapons. Maintenance men and drivers located the armor plate and cut it to fit their trucks. Long sheets of quarter to half inch armor plate was cut to cover the sides and back of the trucks.

Next the weapons were added. Initially, the standard load was two 7.62MM M60 infantry machine guns, mounted in the bed of each truck. One gun was mounted on each side of the vehicle about midway down the bed. This gave each machine gun a good field of fire and allowed the gunners to engage the enemy along the side the road as soon as the ambush was initiated. As more and heavier weapons became available the weapons arrangement changed. Some trucks maintained M60s while others replaced the light M60s with heavier Browning M2 .50 caliber machine guns.

Finally, the men needed to operate the weapons had to found and trained. Although the duty of a gunner was dangerous work there was no shortage of volunteers. Drivers, mechanics, armorers and administrative clerks all volunteered for gunner duty. However, despite the number of volunteers the soldiers quickly found the importance of having the same men assigned to a truck as a crew. The knowledge and confidence brought from working together was essential if the gun truck was to be an effective weapon.

The normal procedure was for the each crew to select a new man to fill a vacancy. Once the crew was fully assembled, it trained on its own time. Live weapons firing was done at the main group camp at Qui Nhon. As the training cycle progressed, the crews became proficient with the various machine guns, grenade launchers and side arms carried on the vehicle. The mix of weapons was determined by the individual crews as was the ammunition load carried by the truck. Prescribed loads

The excitement of being part of a gun truck crew was evident by the look on this young crewman's face as he poses with the twin M2 .50 caliber machine gun mounted in the rear of this gun truck. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

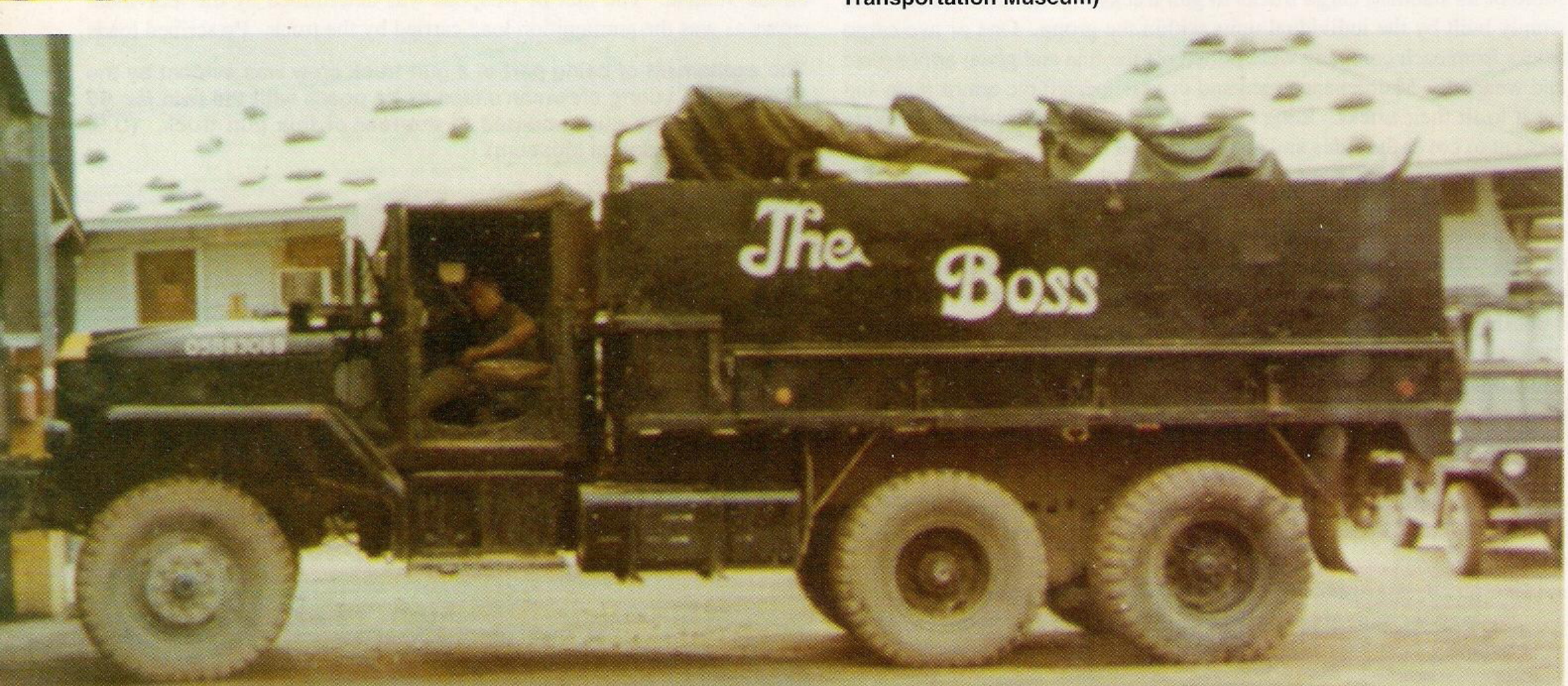


Even the old 3/4 ton vehicles got into the act. *OTTO* mounted armor plate over its vital areas and carried four 7.62MM M60 machine guns on two twin mounts, one firing forward and the other firing to the rear. The cartoon character was from the "Sad Sack" comic strip. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The M60 7.62MM machine guns on *OTTO* were mounted in pairs on field mount. The gun mount consisted of a single cross bar, which, in turn, was attached to a pintle mount. In addition to her guns, *OTTO* also carried extra radios with large whip antennas mounted on both sides of the vehicle. The name was in White, outlined in Light Blue. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

(Left) As the gun trucks grew in numbers the escorting gun jeeps also improved. *TRAIL BOSS*, was an M151 Mutt of the 54th Transportation Battalion. It has an armored windshield and mounts a single 7.62MM M60 machine gun. The name and all lettering was in White. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The Boss, with its three M2 .50 caliber machine guns covered against the dust and dirt, sits waiting for the next convoy run. The vehicle name and serial number were in White. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



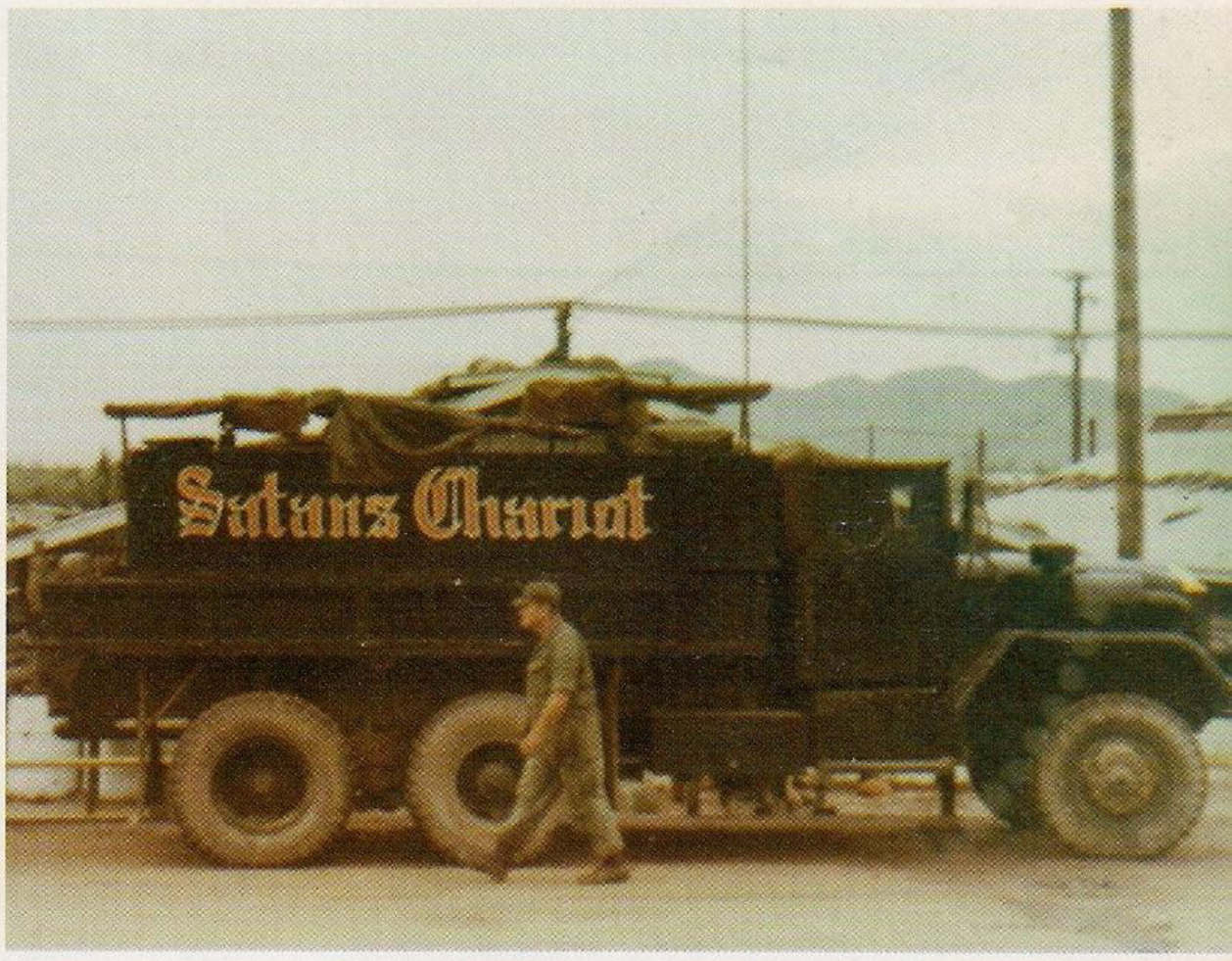
DEVIL WOMAN was an M54 5-ton truck armed with a menacing array of four M2 .50 caliber heavy machine guns mounted to cover all sides of the vehicle. She was one of the few gun trucks that had a picture to go with her name. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Weapons arrangements variety with the availability of weapons and the individual preference of the crews. The MISFITS mounts a forward firing M2 .50 caliber machine gun, a side mounted 7.62MM M60 machine gun and a twin M2 .50 caliber machine gun mount in the center of the bed. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Maverick was an M-54 5-ton truck which had a more stylized shaped armor. The crews found that by cutting off the armor toward the rear they could carry more equipment and still be effective. The extra space was filled with spare tires. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

LITTLE "RESPECT" of the 444th Transportation Company was another M54 5-ton truck. The truck was armed with four single mount M2 .50 caliber machine guns. The vehicle was unusual in that it had the codes on the front bumper framed by a White outline. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The ill-fated *Satans Chariot* sits in the motor pool ready for action. The truck was hit by enemy rockets on three different occasions within the span of one week. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



The young crew of *The Justifier*, of the 57th Transportation Company, poses with their truck before beginning another escort mission at Phu Bai during 1971. The vehicle is unusual in that it had the star on the side door "toned down" and outlined in Red. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The single M60 machine gun, which was standard armament on most gun jeeps, was unable to provide adequate fire power in the event of an ambush. This M151 gun jeep from the 124th Battalion mounted armor on the windshield and had an armament of two M60 machine guns. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The *BLACK WIDOW* was an M54 5-ton truck from the 523rd Transportation Company. She was armed with three single M2 .50 caliber machine gun mounts, two on either side and one at the rear of the truck. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

were between 1,200 and 2,000 rounds per machine gun. However, as many as 10,000 rounds of ammunition could be stored in ammo boxes on the floor of the truck.

Finally, with the trucks and crews armed and ready, the soldiers put the finishing touch on their trucks. Each of the vehicles was given its own name picked out by the crew. The name was painted in bold letters on the flat metal sides of the truck and the art work rivaled some of the best nose art of the Second World War. The gun trucks were now ready and the 8th would soon see if the Hardened Convoy Concept was going to work in combat.

With the advent of the Hardened Convoy Concept, the 8th

The aggressive use of the gun trucks often resulted in the vehicles being severely damaged or destroyed. *BLACK WIDOW* was one of the gun trucks badly damaged in an ambush. (Merrill Longamore)

A convoy from the 8th Transportation Group moves along Route 19. The interval between vehicles was set at 100 yards in order to prevent damage to a second vehicle should the leading truck hit a mine. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Transportation Group changed its Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) that were to be used in the event of an ambush. The new procedures were as follows:

Before an ambush:

--Be alert for changes in familiar scenes along the roadway, look for evidence of apparent road repairs, new filling or paving, road patches, mud smears, or other substances in the roadway. Avoid driving over large pieces of wood, etc since these could conceal a pressure activated mine.

--Expect an ambush upon the detonation of mines, automatic weapons fire, or heavy sniper fire.

During an ambush:

--Radio security force

--Continue moving, maintain interval.

--Vehicles already past the kill zone should continue on to destination.

--Follow in the tracks of the vehicle ahead to prevent further detonation of road mines.

--If disabled, steer off the road to permit the passage of others. Avoid entering kill zone, provide flanking support fire into

This truck has broken an axle. Accidents like this disabled trucks and in this case blocked the road. The next vehicle in line has to pull out and go around, losing precious time and speed climbing the steep pass. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

King Cobra was an M54 5-ton gun truck of the 597th Transportation Company, 8th Transportation Group, which underwent a number of changes during her service in Vietnam. She carried a M113 Armored Cavalry Vehicle mounted in the bed and during this period, the ACAV .50 caliber machine gun turret was painted with Red and White stripes on the lower turret and a field of White stars on the Light Blue upper turret. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Sometime earlier in her career, *King Cobra* did not mount the armor shields on the two rear .50 caliber machine gun positions, making the gunner's easy targets for enemy return fire. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Besides the ACAV .50 caliber turret, *King Cobra* also carried single .50 caliber machine gun mounts at the rear corners of the M113 to cover the sides and rear of the vehicle. A this point, the rear guns had been fitted with armor shields. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

THE UNTOUCHABLE/ONLY THE STRONG SURVIVE of the 359th Transportation Company, 8th Transportation Group was armed with the 7.62MM XM 134 miniguns, one mounted on either side of the vehicle. In addition to the miniguns, she also carried a M2 .50 caliber machine gun mounted to fire forward and a second .50 caliber gun mounted to fire to the rear of the vehicle. Spare tires were often carried in the rear of the truck, since an ambush could quickly flatten all five tires on the side of a truck. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The 7.62MM minigun soon became a favored weapon of gun truck crews. *THE UNTOUCHABLE* mounts two XM 134 minigun which had been retrieved from a helicopter wreck. Gun truck crews showed a great talent for obtaining weapons from any source possible. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

WAR WAGON, was a Cadillac Gage V-100 (XM706 security vehicle) which was used as a convoy escort vehicle. This one was assigned to escort a convoy of the 8th Group. V-100s could carry a variety of turret mounted weapons, this vehicle was armed with a twin 7.62MM machine gun turret and a .50 caliber machine gun on top of the turret for the vehicle commander. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The *EVE OF DESTRUCTION* parked next to the *BLACK WIDOW*. Many of the trucks had slogans on the front and rear of the trucks as well as the names on the sides. *EVE OF DESTRUCTION* sported the inscription *"To Charles With Love"* on its front bumper in White. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

the kill zone.

--Remember that gun trucks provide a maximum base of fire, fight as a team. Deploy as ordered by convoy commander.

--Remember prime targets. These are enemy automatic weapons positions, enemy mortars, enemy rocket positions and assaulting

THE MERCENARY, **a M-54 5-ton gun truck, moves out to take its position in the convoy. The crew had not yet readied the truck for action and canvas gun covers are still draped over the armored sides. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)**

EVE OF DESTRUCTION **on convoy duty. The M54 5-ton mounted two single M2 .50 caliber machine guns firing from the forward side positions and a twin M2 .50 caliber machine gun firing from the middle rear of the bed. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)**

A convoy moves through a village. The large tractor-trailer rigs were very easy targets, especially when they moved through the narrow confines of towns and villages. The vehicles often bunched up, making it harder for gun truck crews to protect them. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

ground forces.

After an ambush:

--Protect and care for wounded personnel, evacuate them as soon as possible.

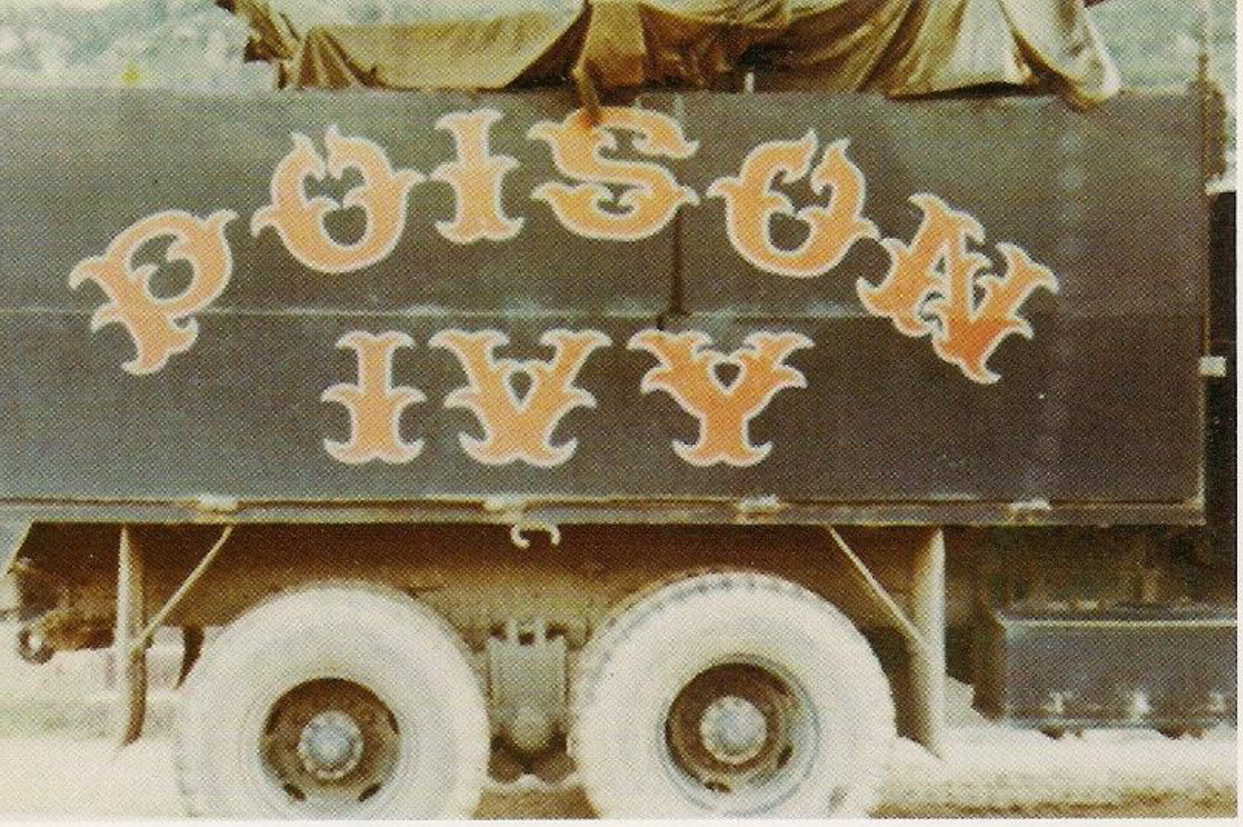
--Reopen roadway, assure that the roadway is mine free.

--Contact EOD to remove any mines encountered.

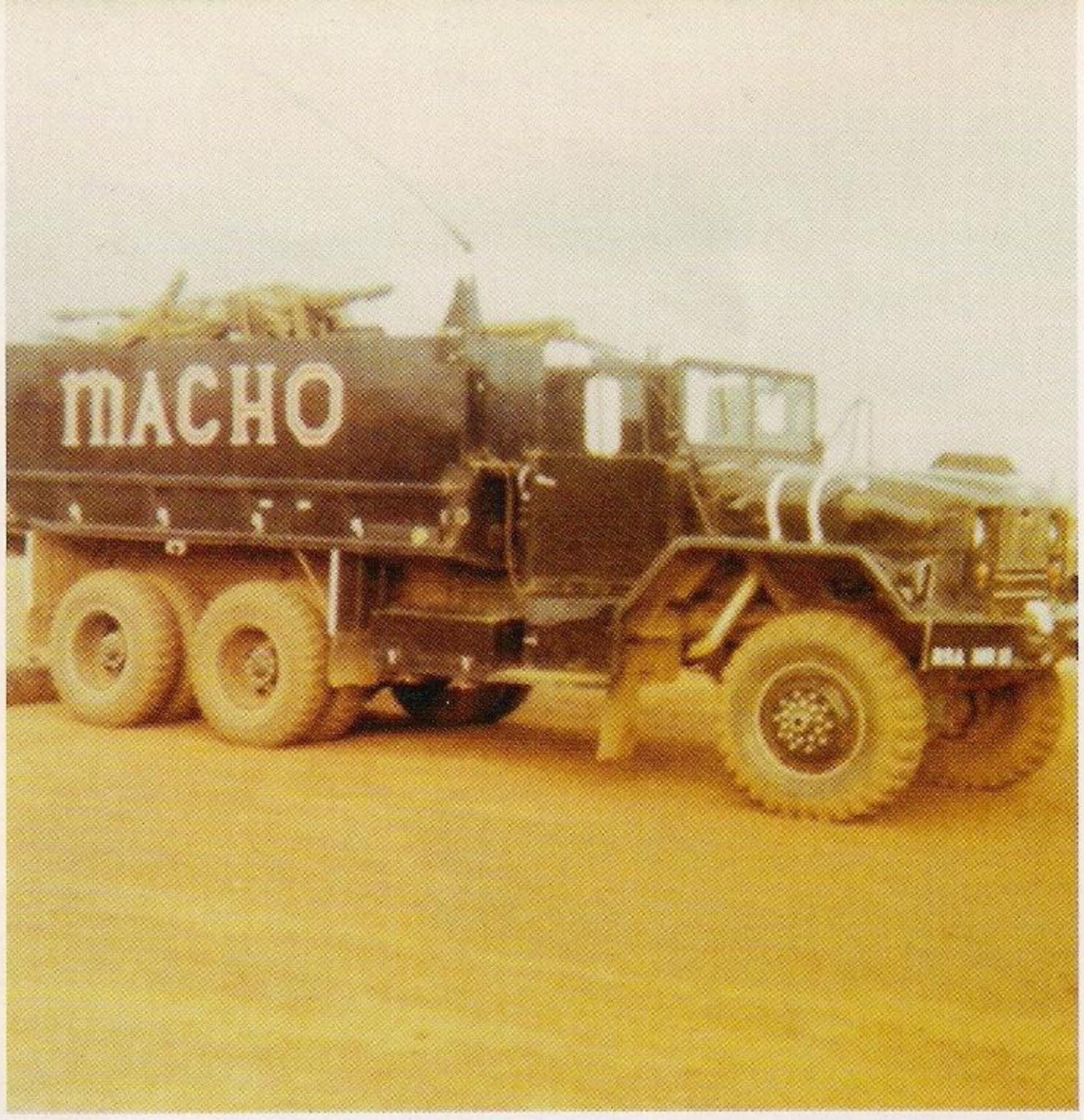
The next big convoy was scheduled for 24 November, and both sides prepared for battle. Early in the morning, sixty-five trucks and three jeeps of the 54th Transportation Battalion left Qhi Nhon bound for the 1st Air Cavalry base at Pleiku. The convoy was led by Lieutenant James P. Purvis and he had taken the precaution of adding six gun trucks to his convoy. The Lieutenant's fear of ambush turned out to be well founded. At 1005, a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) company ambushed the convoy. The lead gun truck was stopped by small arms fire and the enemy opened fire along the entire 300 meter ambush. Within seconds several trucks were hit. The gun trucks, however, also swung into action. American truck drivers aimed their 7.62MM M60 machine guns onto the enemy positions and opened fire. One NVA machine gun position was obliterated less than ten feet from one of the gun trucks by a long and accurate burst of machine gun fire.

A truck carrying ammunition was hit and exploded, destroying one of the gun trucks, as it blew up. Other gun trucks received some damage, but were able to continue to deliver a withering barrage of gun fire on the stunned enemy. Lieutenant Purvis also reported the contact and called for reinforcements. A few minutes later the security elements from the 1st Cavalry Division arrived and the battle ended. The result was a major American victory. The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) company should have been able to wipe out the entire convoy, instead

A gun truck, armed with a single forward firing M2 .50 caliber machine gun and two 7.62MM M60s, one on either side, moves out on convoy duty. The normal ratio of gun trucks to cargo trucks was one gun truck for every ten cargo trucks in the convoy. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



POISON IVY was armored by welding two sheets of armor plating together. The lower plate was outside the inner plate and gave added protection to the crew in the area where enemy rounds were most likely to impact. The vehicle was armed with three machine guns. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



MACHO ready for action with its three M2 .50 caliber machine guns covered with canvas tarps to protect them from the dust and dirt. Keeping the weapons clean and functioning in the Central Highlands was a constant problem due to the dry climate. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

PANDEMONIUM was an M54 5-ton truck which had shortened armor. It mounts single M2 .50 caliber machine guns firing forward and to each side and a twin .50 caliber gun mount in the rear. The M2 machine gun could be set to feed from either side of the gun and the casings ejected out the bottom of the gun. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

(Right) *COLD SWEAT* of the 523rd Transportation Company is ready to roll. The truck has had the exhaust pipe lowered to allow a better field of fire for the machine guns. The drivers side position has also been heavily armored. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The crew of *SIR CHARLES* takes a break while waiting for the convoy to form. It has the ACAV commanders.50 caliber machine gun turret and mounts the standard forward firing M2 .50 caliber machine gun along with two M60s protecting the sides. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

SIR CHARLES was later modified to carry three single M2 .50 caliber machine guns, two replacing the M60s originally carried to protect the vehicle sides. The heavier fire power enhanced the defensive ability of the vehicle. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

OUTLAW, a gun truck from the 359th Transportation Company, 8th Transportation Group awaits the order to move out. The Yellow portion of the hood was another distinctive feature on the gun trucks of the 8th Transportation Group. *OUTLAW* was armed with three M.2 .50 caliber machine guns, two mounted at the front corners and one at the rear. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

BIG BAD JOHN was another gun truck with an M113 body and a ACAV .50 caliber machine gun turret. There were armored shields for the two side mount .50 caliber guns, although the guns were not fitted at this time. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

UNCLE MEAT was a gun truck of the 523rd Transportation Company, 8th Transportation Group. The vehicle was armed with two M60s firing forward and a single M2 .50 caliber machine gun firing to the rear. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

they had destroyed nine trucks (four of which were gun trucks) and damaged seven others. During the fight the Americans had lost two soldiers killed and seventeen others wounded. The enemy had lost forty-one killed and four captured. In addition, there were many enemy blood trails which disappeared back into the jungle. These attested to the accuracy of American fire.

The ambushes continued and the Americans continued to refine their gun truck philosophy and tactics. The configuration of the armor was changed to give the crews more safety and, in late 1967, the armor plating was reinforced and thickened on the corners to deflect enemy rounds away from the crew.

More and heavier guns were also added. Browning M2 .50 caliber heavy machine guns replaced the M60 machine guns on the sides of the trucks and twin .50 caliber machine gun mounts were added to the rear of each gun truck. The ability of the truck drivers to recover and repair weapons went to a new level when they began to retrieve the weapons off of downed American helicopters. Soon twin M60 mounts and 5.56MM XM134 General Electric Miniguns were appearing on the trucks and jeeps of the 8th Group.

The truck drivers also experimented with mounting four M2 .50 caliber machine guns in an electrically driven anti-aircraft mount of the type used on the Second World War M16 half-track. This became the famous "quad-fifty" version of the gun truck. Thicker armor was added and the number of gun trucks per convoy was standardized at one gun

The *EVE OF DESTRUCTION* was the only gun truck which survived the war and was returned intact to the United States. A crewman administers a little spit and polish to the front of the truck. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

***UNCLE MEAT* and *EVE OF DESTRUCTION* of the 124th Transportation Battalion prepare to move out for another convoy escort mission. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)**

Military Police V100 armored cars also provided convoy security for 8th Group convoys traveling on Route 19. Colonel Bellino had hoped to replace the gun trucks with V100s, although this never came to pass. (Army)

truck per every ten cargo trucks. The refinements in doctrine and weaponry came just in time. In December of 1967, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army struck back hard.

At 0815 on 4 December 1967, a convoy of the 54th Transportation Battalion, going to Pleiku, was ambushed by a Viet Cong unit, estimated

A gun trucker snaps a picture of a security element of M113 Armored Personnel Carriers at a road-side check point. These APCs are equipped with the ACAV gum mounts, which gave the crews armor shields for their guns. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

A pair of MP V100 armored cars rest after a convoy escort mission. The V100 could mount a variety of weapons in its turret. These vehicles are both armed with twin 30 caliber machine gun turrets. (Army)

to be of company size (three twenty-thirty man platoons). The Viet Cong had prepared a 3,000 meter (3,290 yard) kill zone along Highway 19. This convoy consisted of fifty-eight five ton cargo trucks, eleven two and a half ton cargo trucks, six gun trucks (armor plated), four gun jeeps and one maintenance truck.

The ambush began when an explosive charge was detonated at the side of the road. The lead gun truck driver then noticed a board with three mines pulled across the road in front of him. He stopped his vehicle and at that moment the vehicle was hit by heavy small arms fire and a 57MM recoilless rifle round, killing the driver. The lead gun jeep (second vehicle in the convoy) also received small arms fire and was stopped. The crews of both vehicles immediately began returning fire,

THE RED BARON awaits it next mission. She was armed with three M2 .50 caliber machine guns. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

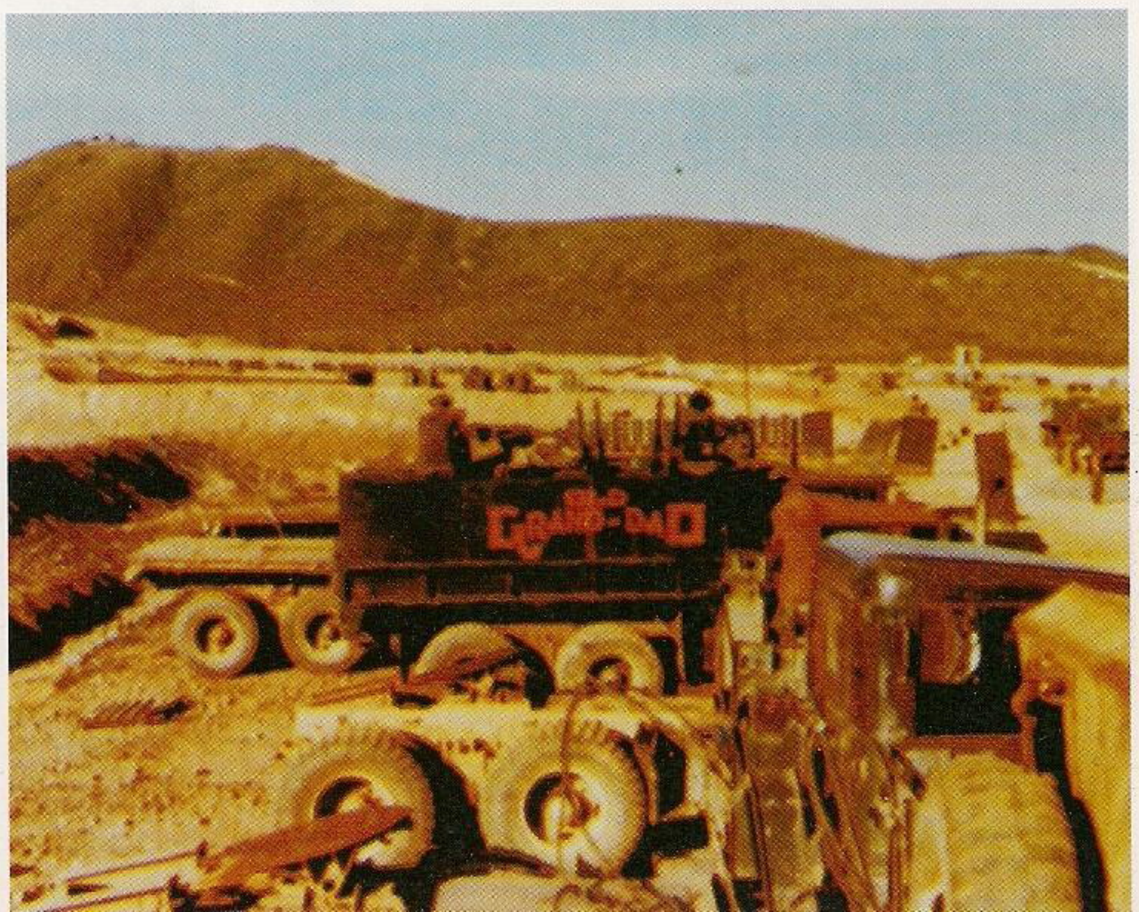
The M113 chassis of *KING KONG* awaits the arrival of a new truck. The vehicle was assigned to the 523rd Transportation Company. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

It did not take long for the crews to upgrade the armor and armament on their gun trucks. The *BIG KAHUNA* of the 58th Transportation Company was modified with an armored cavalry M113 in the bed. It had a forward firing M2 .50 caliber machine gun in a heavily armored commanders position in addition to its side firing M60s. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

MIGHTY MINI of the 64th Transportation Company, 8th Transportation Group has its 7.62MM miniguns and M2 .50 caliber gun protected under canvas gun covers. The truck is another of the interesting versions which has had a steel box put in the bed instead of armor plate. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

At the height of the road war Battery E, 41st Artillery Battalion supported the 8th Group with their M55 quad mounted M2 .50 caliber machine gun trucks. Not to be outdone by the truckers they also named and painted their trucks. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The crew of *OLD GRAND-DAD* prepares for a mission. The Truck mounts two twin-mounted 7.62MM M60 machine guns and an M2 .50 caliber machine gun. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



***BLIND FAITH,* a V100 armored car of the 16th MP Group leads a convoy along Route 19. The vehicle is armed with a twin .30 caliber machine gun turret. (Army)**

utilizing the two M60 machine guns and M79 grenade launcher in the truck and the M60 machine gun in the jeep.

At about the same time, four or five other vehicles received hits from enemy weapons. As American vehicles were disabled, the gun trucks spread throughout the convoy moved forward to provide covering fire and to bring fire to bear on the heart of the enemy kill zone. Four other vehicles received flat tires and body damage. Personnel dismounted and began returning fire under the leadership of 1st Lieutenant Todd, the march unit commander (second vehicle in the convoy).

The gun trucks of the march units continued to fire into the 3,000 meter long kill zone and subsequently one of these was hit by rocket fire, wounding three gunners. The fire power of the convoy gun trucks and gun jeeps was enough to account for all enemy losses prior to the arrival of the reaction force. At the time of the ambush, 0815, a call of "ambush! ambush! ambush!" went out over the radio from the convoy. The reported time of arrival of the helicopter gunships was 0827, twelve minutes after the start of the ambush.

A ground reaction force formed at an artillery base camp and brought in by the Group Commander, arrived at approximately 0830. The quick reaction of convoy personnel and the heavy volume of automatic weapons fire delivered by the machine gunners in the gun trucks along with the effects of 40MM grenades fired by M79 grenade launchers finally broke the enemy ambush prior to the arrival of any of these reaction forces. From the point of view of the convoy, the reaction time of the combat supporting forces was far too slow. Twelve minutes for gunship support was marginal, but the reaction time of fifteen minutes for the first ground troops was excessive.

To allow this length of time to go by after the call "ambush! ambush! ambush!" could have spelled disaster for the convoy, had it not been for the firepower and fast actions of the accompanying gun truck crews. The results of the ambush were as follows: one convoy driver killed and six wounded, thirteen VC were killed and one wounded VC was taken prisoner. One gun truck was destroyed, one gun jeep and several trucks were damaged. It was apparent the VC had intended to stop the convoy, kill the crews and then systematically destroy the vehicles with satchel charges, since several charges were recovered from VC dead. The 8th Transportation Group had proved the value of its gun trucks in combat.

The power of the gun trucks was not lost on the enemy commanders either. The word soon filtered back to the Americans that the VC and NVA had put a bounty on each of the gun trucks and their crews. Bounty or not, it was soon obvious that the gun trucks were the targets of choice for enemy gunners during an ambush. Their ability to inflict heavy casualties, along with the aggressiveness of the crews, made them primary targets for enemy gunners. Most of the gun trucks used by the 8th were shot up or destroyed during their tour of duty. In a one week

A convoy of tractor trailers moves out under the protection of a gun truck. Two of the tractor trailers are the van type that were used to move priority cargo. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

On the road refueling was often done by mobile refuelers. These were little more than standard M35 truck loaded with fuel pods. In an ambush these were prime targets. (Dennis Berg)

period, a gun truck named ***Satan's Lil Angel*** was hit by a total of five Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs) during three different ambushes. During these attacks three crewmen were killed and five others were wounded.

The official history of the 8th Transportation Group contained a vivid account of an ambush seen through the eyes of the men who were involved:

Ambush Alley:

There is one good thing about having the point: you don't have to chew everyone else's dust.

When you moved over to the bad things about leading a truck convoy of ammunition, napalm, gas and oil, you stopped thinking about it and just kept your eyes on the road.

That's where Jerry Christopher's eyes were when he spotted the paper bags, sprouting up out of the road like fat brown mushrooms. There were ten of them, ammonium nitrate fertilizer mines strung on a single fuse line, a "daisy chain" mine. It would blow the axels off the first truck to hit it, blocking the narrow road and forcing the seventy-five truck convoy to grind to a standstill in the ambush kill zone. And Christopher's was that first truck.

At twenty miles per hour, Christopher shouted to his driver, Bob Logston; "We're in the kill zone1" "What?" sail Logston, over the engine roar. "We're in an ambush!" Logston floored his deuce-and-a-half truck, and reached for his rifle.

Someone in the back of the bed yelled, "let's give 'em hell, " and two 7.62MM M60 machine guns in the back of the gun truck open up, drowning out all other sounds. But Christopher was the one who caught hell.

A B40 rocket plowed into the front end of the truck, blowing off the left tire and part of the wheel, skewing the truck around to a grinding halt, twenty-five yards from the mine.

Christopher yell "Contact, contact, contact," on the radio in the cab of his truck, clutched his M79 40MM grenade launcher and tumbled out, followed by Longston. Heavy caliber bullets were already smashing into the windshield of the truck, ripping the cab's armor plate and plowing through the engine block

The next rig, a five ton truck packed with small arms ammunition, downshifted, pulled out of line, and roared on through, trying to clear the kill zone. He never saw the "daisy chain" that blew off his front end. He swerved out of control, off the right side of the road. The third trucker was pouring on the coal to his rig when he hit the remaining mines. He lost his front wheels, slid like a hurtling demon seventy-five yards down the road and ended up in a ditch across the road, his load on fire. He was carrying a cargo of 155MM high explosive artillery shells.

SP4 Dick Doninquez revved his engine and raced for the gap. He was carrying a load of CS gas, a noxious chemical that caused vomiting and uncontrollable sickness. He mad it through, charging on down the road toward Pleiku to get help for the convoy. His was the only truck to make it through.

The next rig, also carrying a load of 155MM projectiles, took a B40 rocket hit and slew to a halt in the center of the road, fifty yards from Christopher's rig. He was engulfed in flames. The road was now completely blocked, no more vehicles could get through.

Christopher, taking cover behind his own truck, was firing 40MM

In the heat and dust of the Central Highlands, water was a prime concern. Most convoys carried at least one M104 400 gallon waters trailers, known as "Water Buffalos". Others would be filled at watering locations and dropped off at check points along the route. (Dennis Berg)

grenades across the road, trying to get the B40 rocket man. He couldn't find him to get a clear shot. The 155MM artillery rounds on the burning rig started cooking off and blast after blast rocked the corpse of the deuce-and-a-half, showering everyone and everything with shrapnel. Christopher crawled up front looking for his driver.

Logston was lying on the road, the lower half of his body a bloody mess of machine gun bullets. He was trying to crawl out of the line of fire. "Bob, you all right?" said Christopher uselessly as he pulled Logston off into the grass. "What are we gonna do now, Jerry?" moaned Logston. Helicopter, unaware of the carnage below them, wheeled high in the sun and flew off into space. "Why don't they do something?" pleaded Logston in feeble anger. There was no help.

Christopher got him under the gun truck, bandaged him as best he could, muttering "Hang on - we'll make it ok." He wished he was sure of that.

A rocket hit the tailgate of the truck above him and exploded. SP4 Czerwinsky, one of the machine gunners, took critical frag hits all over his body. Private Jim Boyd got hit in the arm. Now both M60s were out of action, smashed and useless. As Christopher tried to save Czerwinsky's life, Boyd found a rifle with his good arm and started firing at the enemy positions.

Christopher could see North Vietnamese Army sappers in the grass across the road, so close that he didn't think that the rounds from his M79 would have enough travel to arm and detonate. Luckily, they did.

Behind Christopher was a 700 yard long river of death and flames. Gas tankers had ripped open in huge mushrooms of flame, frying their drivers in the metal ovens of their cab. Shells, from bullets to rockets, were cooking off all up and down the convoy. North Vietnamese sappers were climbing on top of trucks, placing charges and firing down into the confused crowd of truckers hiding in the grass across the road.

Christopher saw NVA being shot off trucks by truckers firing back with their M16s. They reminded him of ducks in a shooting gallery. The road was littered with burning, blasted corpses, flaming, twisted piles of steel and wreckage that had once been trucks.

These dead VC troops were left along side the road after an ambush as a reminder to others. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

As late as 1971, gun trucks were still riding the roads of Vietnam. *THE JUSTIFIER* was escorting convoys out of Quang Tri during 1971. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

A line up of gun trucks in the 8th Transporation Group motor pool. The trucks of the 8th Group all had the front of the hood painted in Yellow. The first three trucks have one White and one Yellow head light. The armement also varies, the first two trucks are carrying M113s with ACAV turrets, whle the others are earlier style trucks with unshielded M2 .50 caliber machine gun mounts. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

SNOOPY II was a gun truck armed with four individual M2 .50 caliber machine guns, one firing forward, one firing to the rear and one on each side of the vehicle. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Roy Handers, a twenty-two year old trucker from Spartenburg, South Carolina was a volunteer machine gunner on another gun truck, the seventeenth truck in the convoy. The first sign of trouble for him had been a B40 rocket that hit just inches behind his truck. Handlers and his buddy, Bob Sas, opened up with their machine guns. Another rocket hit the cab, wounding the driver and throwing him to the floorboards. The huge truck lumbered out of control off the side of the road, straight into the enemy gun positions.

With a sickening feeling in his gut, Handlers felt the rig start to flip over into the ditch, flinging him helpless to the wall like the roller coasters he used to ride as a kid. She rolled, stopping upside down in the grass. Handlers found himself pinned to the ground, his leg cought under the truck . Sas was up forward, crushed to death under

the cab. With his hands, Handlers dug his leg free, fortunately, it was not broken.

In the roaring, swirling battle, Handlers, light-headed with shock and cut all over, wandered up forward. He heard a cry for help. The driver of his truck was pinned in the cab. A North Vietnamese machine gunner on the other side of the truck kept him from trying to free the wounded man.

He started crawling around, looking for a gun, anything he could use as a weapon. There was a "plop" beside him and Handlers rolled without looking to see what it was. It was a grenade. Fragments from the blast tore open both legs and threw him ten feet.

Reeling like a drunk, unable to see anything but a spinning blur, he staggered to his feet and tried to get back to his buddy in the cab. A merciful blackness washed over him, Roy Handlers was out of the war. He woke in a hospital, hours later.

Tanks, Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) and helicopters finally got to them, pouring a huge volume of fire into the ambush forces along the road and driving them off. The cost was high, three truckers were killed and twenty-two were wounded. Thirteen trucks were totally destroyed and another nine were damaged.

Christopher, after the last of the wounded were flown out, stood up and looked around him at the carnage. At least, he thought, they named the road right. They called it "Ambush Alley."

The growing number and frequency of the ambushes finally convinced the Army to bring in reinforcements for the men of the 8th Transportation Group. In late December, elements of the 4th Battalion, 60th Artillery (Automatic Weapons, Self-Propelled) began operating with the convoys. The battalion was armed with the M42 Duster, a tracked vehicle mounting dual 40MM Bofors anti-aircraft guns. The 4th Battalion was augmented by Battery E, 41st Artillery which operated M55 5-ton trucks armed with quad-.50 caliber machine gun turrets. The Dusters were used for mainly for perimeter defense, and an occasional convoy escort, but the trucks of Battery E were ideal for routine convoy protection. In fact, they fit right in and began normal operations along side the gun trucks.

The unit history also told a story of one of the quad-.50 trucks, named ***Nancy***.

Nancy was no lady. With Yellow snarling teeth and a heart of armor plate, she can make life hell for men who "court" her every week in Ambush Alley.

Nancy is a truck - a standard Army deuce-and-a-half, but with some extra "options" you can't get in a showroom. Like five machine guns, armor plating, M79 40MM grenade launchers and radios.

Nancy and another truck just like her, both mounted quad-.50 caliber machine gun turrets. These turrets mount four M2 .50 caliber machine guns under the control of a single gunner. They are insurance policies for the trucks of the 8th Transportation Group, insurance against the kind of hijackers that would send any teamster running for cover fast, but which are SPO for 8th Group truckers who run the daily convoys from Vietnam's central coast northward or up into the Central Highlands.

Recently, a forty truck convoy was headed for Pleiku, making the long run up Route 19, "Ambush Alley," with a load of high explosive

A serial of M35 deuce and a half task vehicles leaves the loading point at the start of another convoy. Individual serials (groups of trucks) had different destinations and although they traveled in large convoys they often split up at various destinations, so it was important for the serial to stay together. If a serial was large enough, it could very well have its own gun truck escort. (Dennis Berg)

The business end of one of the 5-ton M54 gun truck conversions. The imposing height and armor of the M113 in the rear bed give it a frightening appearance. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

artillery rounds.

Nancy was last in line, with her fire team of gun jeeps and a armored light weapons truck. Unexpectedly, the mortars hit - first they bracketed the road, then scored a direct hit on the tractor-trailer just ahead, blowing all eight rear tires, but the load was untouched and the GI piloting the rig kept going on the rims.

That was Nancy's cue.

SGT Jimmy Wood, the team leader, ordered Nancy's driver, SP5 Dennis Morningstar, to pull out around the convoy and head for the kill zone to cover the trucks.

SP4 Rudy Salinas, in the quad-.50 turret, opened fire, while SP4 Jerry Swick, dancing in the open fed her ammunition. It was tight, they could see the blasts of smoke from the North Vietnamese gun muzzles, not twenty-five yards away in the grass. Salinas' answering blast of fire was a stunning roar of sound. But then two of his guns jammed.

BRUTUS kicks up dust as the gun truck leaves the motor pool for a mission. The truck mounts two single M2 .50 caliber machine guns on the sides and a twin M2 .50 caliber machine gun mount at the rear. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Wood opened up with his cab mounted M60 machine gun, trying to stem the tide of fire. But it too jammed. Just as he leaned down for his rifle, a bullet smashed through the firewall, spewing upward to clip him through both legs. He was out of action, but Nancy fired on.

The ambush was all in a day's work for the 8th Transportation Group. The 8th, the biggest truck outfit in this half of the world, runs 120-truck convoys to both Pleiku, in the highlands and to Bong Son, north of the Group's Qui Nhon headquarters. With deuce-and-a-halfs, and five ton tractor trailers, the 8th moves needed supplies, about 4,000 tons a day, to the 4th Inf Div, the 173rd Airborne Brigade, An Khe base camp, the Korean Tiger Division and three engineering groups. Everything from beer to bombs.

On 30 January 1968, a convoy of eighty trucks left Qui Nhon destined for Pleiku. Escorting the convoy were seven gun trucks, eight gun jeeps and three M55 quad-.50 trucks. In An Khe the convoy security element was beefed-up with the addition of a tank and several M113 armored personal carriers from the security force of the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

At 1000, the convoy had reached Check Point 102 (CP 102), the end of the area of operation (AO) of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, and the additional security element pulled out of the convoy and stopped. Approximately one mile west of CP 102, the convoy came under fire by elements of the VC and NVA. Automatic weapons fire raked the convoy, mortar rounds fell among the trucks and a steady stream of small arms fire cracked from the trees near the road. The American response was sudden and overwhelming. The gun trucks, M55 quad-.50s and gun jeeps delivered a murderous fire into the ambush site, while the 173rd security element moved in from CP 102 and elements from the 4th Div moved from the west to engage the hostile force. The tank and armored personal carriers charged into the trees to route the enemy from their prepared positions. Within minutes the convoy commander had called for air support and almost immediately had F-111As, F-104s and helicopter gun ships over his position.

The enemy retreated immediately and did not leave behind any dead or wounded. The Americans lost two soldiers slightly injured and a few bullet holes in one of the trucks. After the road was cleared by EOD personnel, the convoy proceeded approximately thirty-five meters and again received mortar fire. None of the vehicles were hit and the convoy kept moving. The heavy fire power of the convoy escort had guaranteed its safety. The combined effects of gun trucks, M55 quad-.50s, armored personal carriers and tanks made convoy attacks risky at best for the enemy.

The next day, a convoy under the command of Lieutenant Wilson,

Even with the escort of gun truck and gun jeeps convoy operations in Vietnam were a risky business. Route 19 was a long and twisting road that traveled through enemy controlled territory. (Dick Gleason)

The best form of convoy security was a combination of gun trucks and helicopter gun ships flying close escort. There were, however, never enough helicopters and the gun trucks remained the first line of defense. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The crew of an M54 5-ton gun truck pulls into a staging area followed by an escorting gun jeep. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

departed An Khe at 1430, bound for Pleiku. The convoy consisted of twenty-four five ton tractors with trailers, two radio equipped gun jeeps and three two and a half ton gun trucks of the 124th Transportation Battalion (Truck). The convoy was joined by an element of the 54th Transportation Battalion (Truck) consisting of seven five ton cargo trucks, a two and a half ton gun truck and a radio equipped gun jeep located at the end of the convoy. Additionally, two M55 quad-.50 caliber gun trucks were attached from B Battery 4/60 Artillery for security. At 1520, as the middle of the convoy approached the base of the Mang

UH-1 Huey helicopter gunships often supplied close air support to convoys under attack. Normally, two such gunships would be assigned to escort convoys through dangerous areas. It was not uncomon for the VC and NVA to wait until the gun ships had to depart for refueling to launch an ambush. (Bell)

Besides gunship support, UH-1 Hueys also were the primary medivac helicopter, transporting the wounded back for medical attention. (Bell)

Giang Pass; mortar rounds started hitting in close proximity to the center of the column. The enemy was not adjacent to the road, but was positioned halfway up the Mang Giang Pass and located within the woodline.

The lead elements of the convoy and the convoy commander had already passed through the approximately 400 yard kill zone when the enemy sprang the ambush. Lieutenant Wilson, the convoy commander , was located at the front of the convoy when the firing started and he immediately turned around and proceeded back through the kill zone, with his gunner firing his M60 on the enemy positions. After reaching the end of the kill zone, he turned around again and started back toward the pass. He had traveled about fifty meters when his jeep received a direct hit by a mortar and burst into flames. The jeep went off the road into a ditch and continued to burn. Lieutenant Wilson was killed instantly, SP4 Fowlke, the machine gunner, was seriously injured and SP4 Brammer, the driver was slightly injured. The lead gun truck continued to escort the head of the column to the top of the pass, then returned to position itself at the edge of the kill zone to aid the remainder of the convoy. The second gun truck joined the first, taking up a firing position approximately fifty meters from the first truck. The rear gun truck headed toward the ambush site, but was halted by security personnel at Check Point 102. The driver, SP5 Jackson, dismounted to find out what was going on.

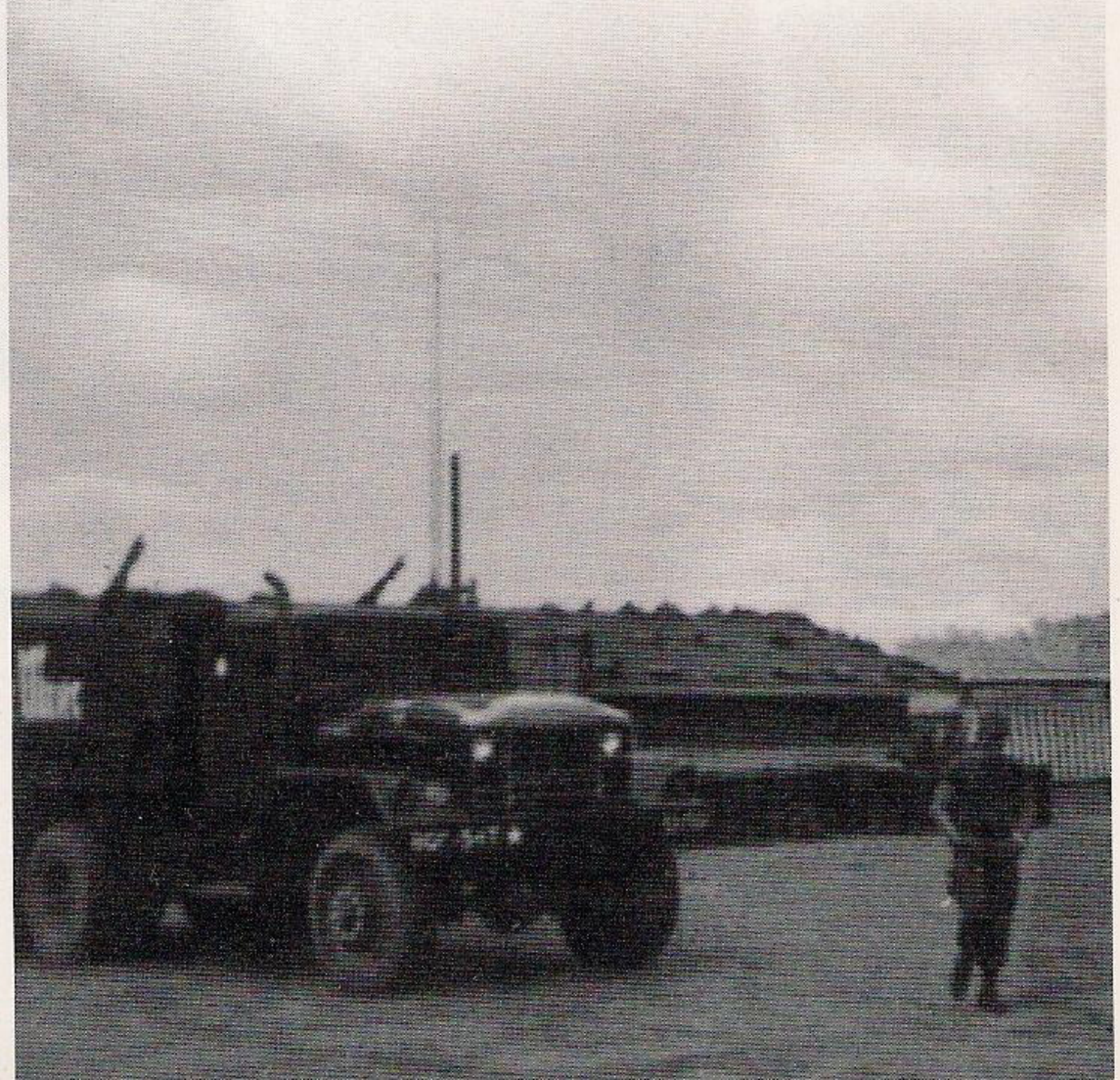
At this time, the rear gun jeep, driven by PFC Tidwell, arrived and informed the security forces and Jackson that the convoy was being ambushed and needed their assistance. PFC Tidwell jumped into the gun truck and headed toward the ambush site, while Jackson climbed into the rear and manned one of the guns. The gun truck proceeded up to where Lieutenant Wilson's jeep was on fire, stopped and returned fire until instructed by the military police to move forward. SP5 Jackson and SP4 Green were slightly injured while in the rear of the gun truck. The two quad-.50s proceeded through the kill zone with one returning fire as it moved through.

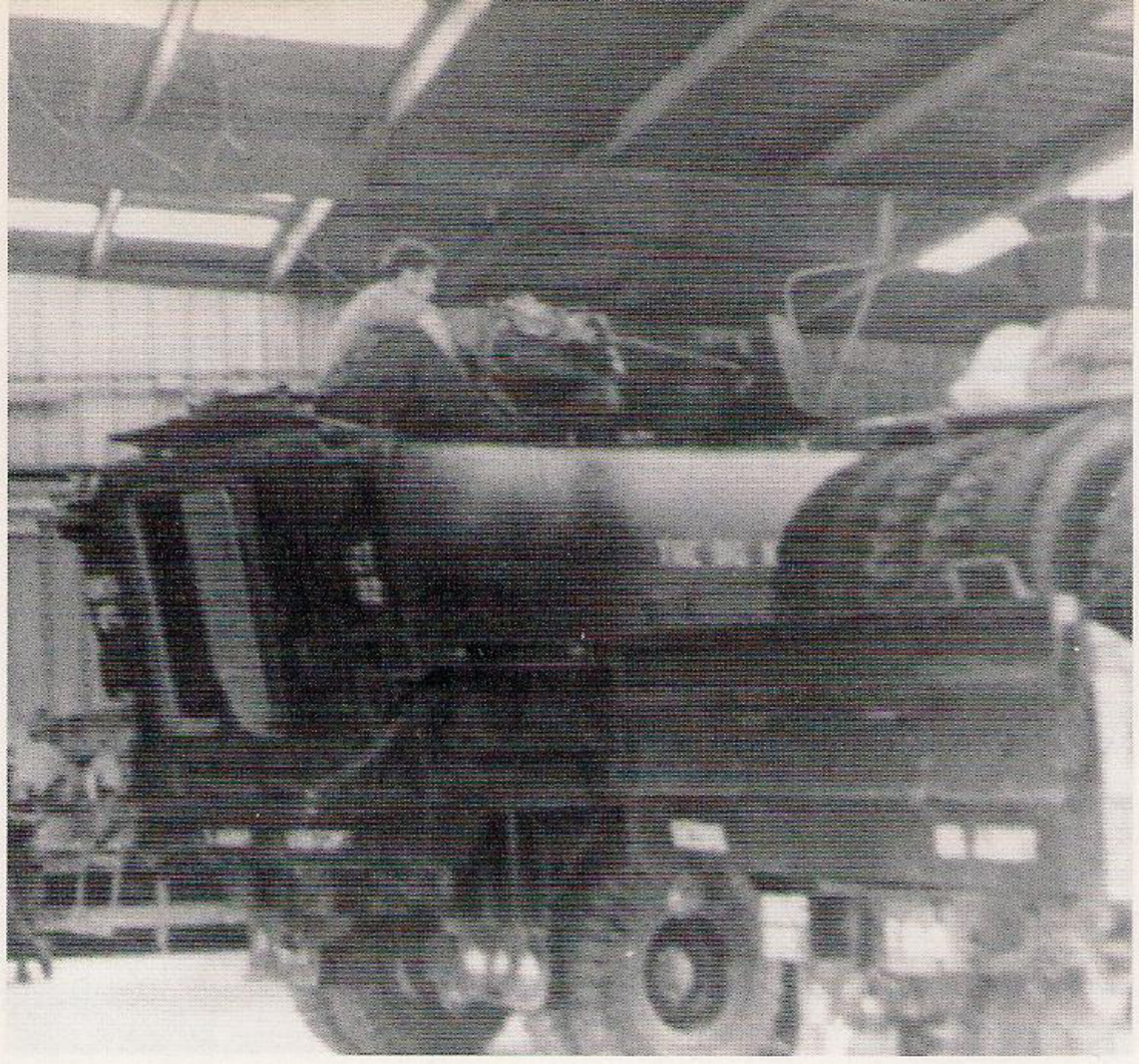
The enemy force hit the convoy with 60 and 82MM mortars, automatic weapons and small arms fire. Only one vehicle, Lieutenant Wilson's jeep, was destroyed.

Enemy activity continued into February. At 1325 on 13 February 1968, a convoy under the control of the 124th Transportation Battalion departed An Khe for a return trip west on Route 19 to Pleiku. The convoy consisted of twenty-eight cargo vehicles, one maintenance vehicle, two gun jeeps, three gun trucks and three M55 quad-.50 gun trucks.

At 1900, the convoy was 200 meters west of the base of Mang Giang Pass when the front elements came under fire from mortars and small arms. Convoy personnel in the gun trucks immediately returned fire in the direction of the suspected enemy positions covering the convoy as

A soldier walks by an M54 5-ton gun truck in the motor pool of the 8th Transportation Group base camp at Qhi Nhon. The truck's two side mounted 7.62MM M60 machine guns are clearly visible. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)





As the road war continued and the requirement for gun trucks increased, American forces in Vietnam ran out of armor plate. Resourceful gun truck crews adapted damaged M113 armored personal carriers to the back of M54 5-ton trucks. The result was an instant gun truck. *THE BIG KAHUNA* mounted two single M60s on each side and one M2 .50 caliber machine gun firing forward. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

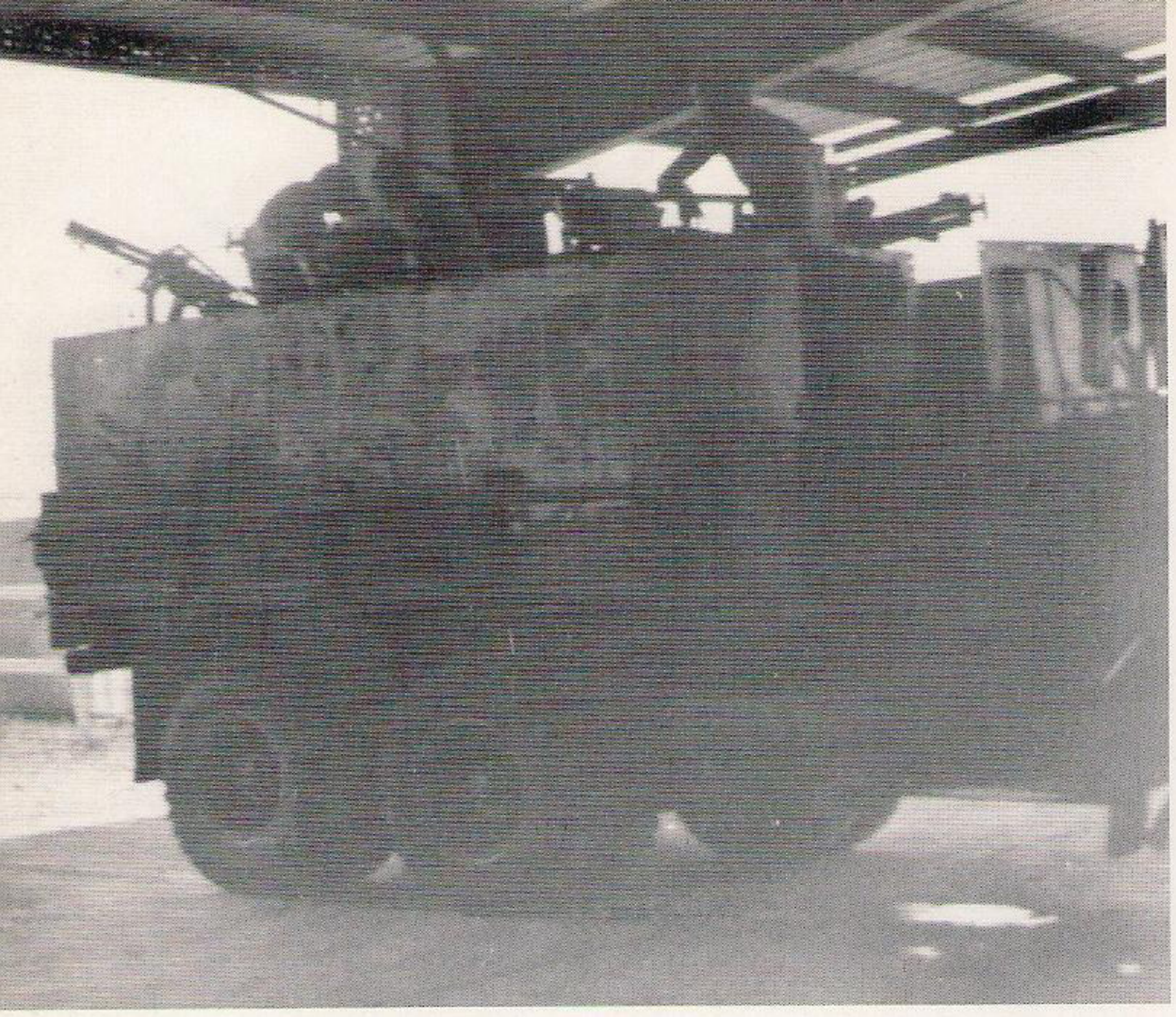
the convoy commander moved his convoy through the area. He also directed one of the attached (4/60 Artillery) quad-.50 gun trucks accompanying the convoy to provide fire support in the direction of the enemy mortar positions. Security forces from the 173rd Airborne Brigade

When two convoys met on a road, it often took careful maneuvering to avoid a mishap. Usually, one convoy would pull off to the side to allow the other to pass. This convoy has halted to allow the outbound convoy to pass quickly. A bunched group of trucks like this would be a very inviting target for VC and NVA troops. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

***THE BIG KAHUNA* being readied for a mission. A ladder has been added to the rear of the vehicle to aid in boarding. These vehicles were known as "third generation gun trucks." (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)**

arrived and, with air support, also began attacking the enemy positions. There were no U.S. casualties and there were no vehicles damaged. Approximately seven mortar rounds were fired at the convoy.

A little over a week later, the enemy struck again. At 0715 on 21 February 1968, a large convoy under the control of the 27th Transportation Battalion, departed Qui Nhon headed west on Route 19 for Pleiku. The convoy consisted of fifty-four cargo vehicles, four gun trucks, four gun jeeps, and a M55 quad-.50 gun truck. At 0950, the convoy came under enemy fire from B40 rockets, automatic weapons and small arms. The gun trucks immediately moved into covering positions and returned fire in the direction of the enemy positions south of the road. The 27th Battalion quad-.50 truck moved into the kill zone, which was estimated to be some 300 meters, and opened fire. This truck was



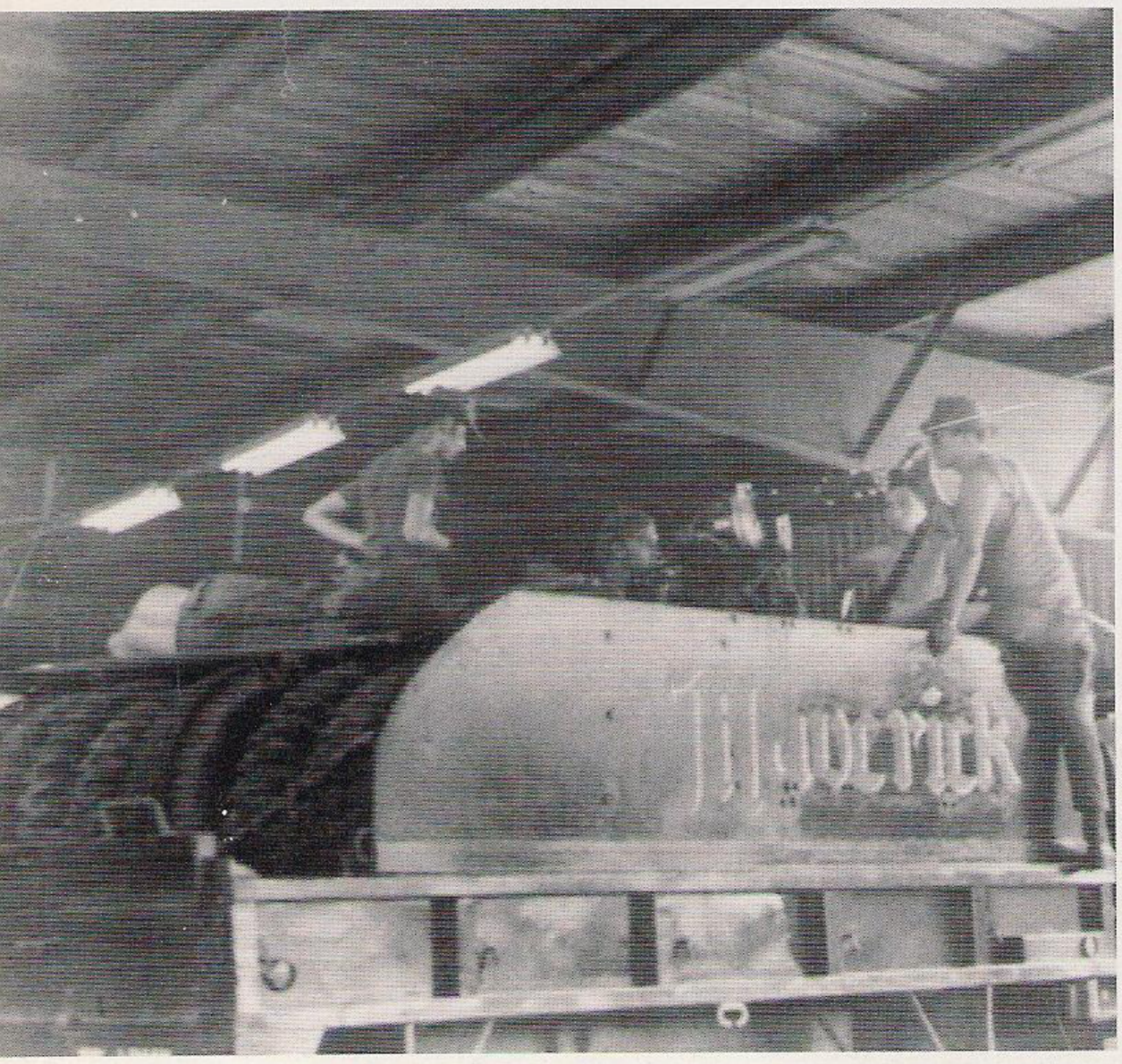
When they weren't on the road, crews were constantly tending their vehicles. The crew of COLD SWEAT was working on the weapons mounts. The heavy recoil of the machine guns often separated the welds on the mounts and they had to be constantly checked and repaired. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

credited with at least one enemy killed. APC' s from the 173rd Airborne Brigade arrived and engaged the enemy forces, calling in an artillery strike on the suspected enemy positions.

Three vehicles, including the quad-.50, were damaged. The enemy force was estimated to be a ten-twelve man unit, which lost one man killed and one wounded. A number of carefully prepared enemy fox-holes were later discovered in the ambush area.

The month of March held its share of action for the men of the 8th. At 0600 on 4 March 1968, an 8th Transportation Group convoy, under the control of the 54th Transportation Battalion, departed Qui Nhon for Pleiku on Route 19. The convoy consisted of 104 task vehicles, four

MAVERICK was given a new sting by having its side mounted guns replaced by XM103 7.62MM Miniguns. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



As the drivers of the 8th Transportation Group built their gun trucks they also took the time to armor and personalize the cabs of their trucks. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

gun jeeps and eight gun trucks. At approximately 0900, the convoy was held up at Check Point 89 by the tactical security force due to reported enemy activity in the area of Mang Giang Pass. The convoy was allowed to proceed at approximately 1130 escorted by a tank and two M113 Armored Personnel Carriers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade. At 1145, the convoy came under heavy fire from mortars, small arms and automatic weapons. The gun trucks immediately returned fire in the direction of the enemy force, which was entrenched within the tree line on the north side of the road. Small arms fire was also received from the south side of the road. Two quad-.50s the 4/60 Artillery and one from 27th Transportation Battalion, which was behind the convoy, moved up and opened fire on the enemy throughout the kill zone, estimated to be 500-1000 meters long.

A reaction force consisting of one tank, four APCs and four helicopter gun ships arrived within five minutes. There were eight convoy personnel wounded, two from the 4/60 Artillery vehicles. Five vehicles were damaged. The enemy force, estimated to be approximately fifty men, retreated into the brush, leaving none of their dead or wounded in the area. The convoy remained in place until 1430, when it was directed to return to An Khe.

At 0600 on 8 March 1968, an 8th Transportation Group convoy, consisting of seventy-nine task vehicles, four gun jeeps and five gun trucks, left Qui Nhon for Pleiku on Route 19. For the first two hours of the trip, everything remained quiet, then at 0830, the third gun truck of the first serial was hit by a claymore mine, damaging the front tires. The mine explosion was followed by heavy small arms fire and automatic weapons fire from both sides of the road.

The enemy force was spread out in well dug in positions for approximately 1,500 to 2,000 meters . The gun trucks and gun jeeps maneuvered into covering positions and immediately opened fire. They were joined by three quad-.50 gun trucks from the 4/60 Artillery, which had been traveling with the convoy. These were reinforced by an infantry company from the 173rd Airborne Brigade, which was in the immediate area.

The infantry company flanked the enemy positions and heavy contact was maintained from some fifteen minutes, during which time the 173rd company commander was killed.

One gun truck and one task vehicle were damaged. Two U.S. personnel were wounded (one convoy and one from the 173rd) and the 173rd company commander was killed. The convoy was allowed to proceed after a twenty minute delay.

At 0915, approximately two kilometers west of Check Point 102, a

Security elements, often MP detachments, manned check points mounted in M113 Armored Personnel Carriers. (Terry Love)

vehicle hit a mine. The cab of the truck was then struck by small arms fire, wounding the driver. This was followed by a B40 rocket which set the vehicle's cargo (JP-4 fuel) on fire. Small arms and additional rock-

A cloud of dust marks the progress of a convoy as it moves through the Central Highlands. This cloud made it easy for the VC and NVA to prepare while the convoy was still miles away. The jungle often came down close to the road, offering ideal ambush conditions. (Terry Love)

ets were directed against the column and once again the gun trucks moved into position and opened fire on the enemy positions. The gun trucks kept up a barrage of covering fire as the remainder of the convoy maneuvered around the burning vehicle . A short time later, security forces arrived and engaged the enemy .

One convoy driver was wounded, one vehicle was damaged and one was destroyed. The number of enemy losses was not reported.

On 23 March 1968, a night shuttle convoy was proceeding west on Highway 1 toward the cargo loading sites in the Cha Rang Valley. At approximately 0015, the convoy, consisting of five task vehicles, one

The M113/M54 combination became popular with the gun truck crews. The crew of *BUDAH the GREEK GOD* await the order to move out. The truck mounts two M60 machine guns and one M2 .50 caliber machine gun. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

gun truck and one gun jeep approached ROK bridge. At this point, the convoy commander, 1st Lieutenant Paul J. Stegmayer, observed a POL pipe line fire in the vicinity of Tuy Phovc. After reporting the fire, he proceeded on with his column. As the convoy reached the site of the fire, an explosion occurred on the north side of the road near Lieutenant Stegmayer's jeep, followed by heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire. Although both the Lieutenant and his driver received wounds from flying glass and shrapnel, they were able to cross over the bridge at the site of the pipe line fire. Due to the intense enemy fire, only the gun jeep and one task vehicle were able to clear the kill zone.

Lieutenant Stegmayer crossed back over the bridge to take control of the rest of the convoy. Moving from vehicle to vehicle, he ensured that all drivers had dismounted and were engaging the enemy. With the arrival of a reaction force of three gun trucks, a gun jeep and a quad-.50, gun truck, he again crossed the bridge to his jeep to direct artillery fire onto the suspected enemy positions. The enemy force, estimated to be a fifteen man sapper unit, broke contact and fled the area. All six vehicles in the convoy received small arms hits and four men were wounded. It was believed that the enemy objective had been to destroy the bridge and when the shuttle convoy arrived on the scene, the sappers may have mistaken them for a reaction force and opened fire. The actions of Lieutenant Stegmayer and his men contributed to the failure of the enemy mission.

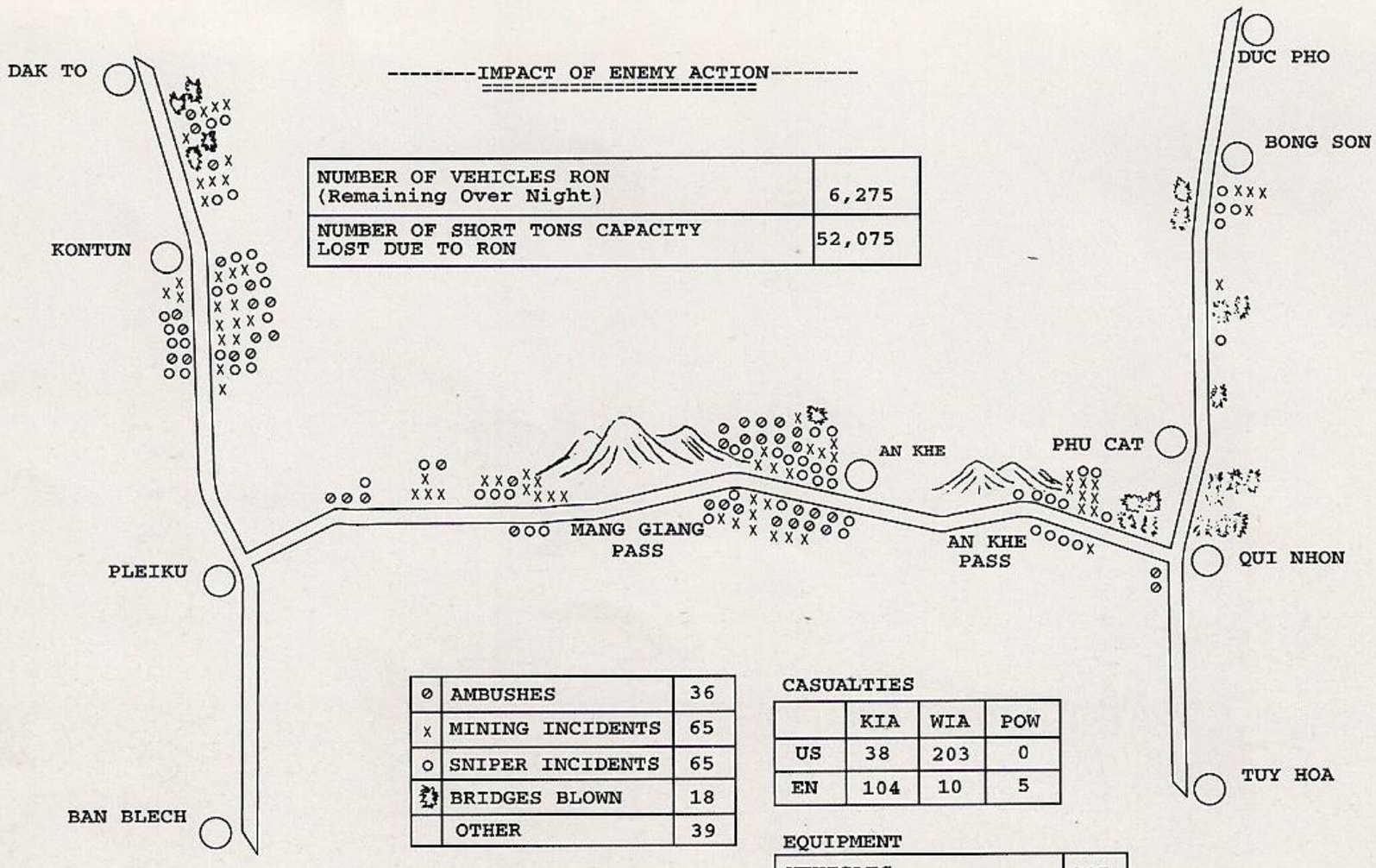
The intensity and frequency of the ambushes subsided somewhat after the Spring of 1968. The attacks were reduced to a few scattered snipers and squad-sized ambushes. Still the men of the 8th Group continued to make the enemy pay whenever he attacked.

In the early afternoon of 14 August 1968, a convoy of the 54th Transportation Company departed Qui Nhon on Route 19 bound for Pleiku. The convoy consisted of sixty-eight task vehicles, seven gun trucks, five gun jeeps, and a quad-.50 gun truck. At 1545, as the first serial of the convoy was headed west just past Bridge 34, an enemy force (dressed in ARVN Marine uniforms) attacked the convoy with machine gun fire and B40 rockets. The enemy force was estimated to be more than a platoon and less then a company in size. Four gun trucks, one quad-.50 and a gun jeep maneuvered into position to protect the convoy and immediately returned fire within the approximately 300 yard kill zone.

A reaction force of six APCs and three helicopter gunships arrived within five minutes. All vehicles made it clear of the kill zone under the protective fire of the gun trucks, although four were slightly damaged and one was heavily damaged. The 8th lost four men wounded and the convoy commander reported observing twelve enemy troops hit by the heavy and accurate return fire from the gun trucks. After security forces swept the area, four enemy bodies were found. The wounded Americans were medivaced out by helicopter to the 71st Med Evac Hospital, where two were treated and released.

At 0815 on 23 August 1968, the 88th Transport Company of the 124th Transportation Battalion departed An Khe enroute to Pleiku with thirty

8th Transportation Group Area Of Operations



Securiy elements were stationed around various check points along Vietnamese highways. This element is equiped with M60 tanks and M42 Dusters. (Terry Love)

While the 8th was fighting its road war in the Central Highlands, other transportation groups were operating in the south. This convoy was being formed with an escort of at least one M60 tank. (Terry Love)

The *ORIENT EXPRESS* was destroyed not in an ambush, but in a traffic accident. It was taken to the motor pool where it was stripped of usable parts and scrapped. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

loaded tractor-trailer combinations, three gun trucks and two gun jeeps. At 0900, an enemy force, estimated to be two rifle companies, attacked the convoy 300 meters west of Check Point 27 (CP27), just as it was passing pump station 3 at the base of Mang Giang Pass. The enemy fired rockets, mortars and automatic weapons into a kill zone that extended the entire length of the convoy.

The lead gun truck, with Lieutenant Mack, the convoy commander, drove back into the kill zone and engaged the enemy, while the trailing gun truck moved forward to offer fire support, along with the rear gun jeep. The convoy suffered one killed and five wounded. The rear gun jeep was manned by PFC Wilson and SGT Capizola, PFC Wilson was killed and SGT Capizola was wounded while supporting the halted vehicles. One tractor trailer was destroyed by a mortar round and six other task vehicles were abandoned in the kill zone due to heavy damage. Four other vehicles were damaged but were able to make it out of the kill zone on their own power, escorted by the gun trucks. Two M42 Dusters were the first reaction forces to arrive on the scene (10-15 minutes after the start of the ambush). These were followed by a platoon of Armored Personnel Carriers which swept the area and found five enemy bodies, killed by the fire from the convoy gun trucks.

On 31 August 1968, the 8th Group was ambushed again. At 0900 a convoy under the control of the 88th Transportation Company, 124th Transportation Battalion departed An Khe bound for Pleiku. The convoy consisted of thirty-three tractor-trailer combinations, three gun trucks and two gun jeeps.

At 0945, a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) force estimated to be 100 strong attacked the convoy using mortars, rockets, automatic weapons small arms and grenades. The ambush kill zone extended some 1,700 yards along Route 19. The two gun trucks immediately returned fire, and one was damaged enough to be abandoned in the kill zone. During the thirty minute fight, seven task vehicles were also abandoned, with their crews mounting other vehicles as they moved through the kill zone. The convoy lost one man killed and six wounded. Four of the wounded were medivaced to An Khe while the other two continued on with the convoy.

At the time of the ambush, the two helicopter gunships that had been escorting the convoy, were on the ground at An Khe for refueling. Within ten minutes, the reaction force of five Armored Personnel Carriers and six helicopter gun ships arrived and artillery fire was called in on the enemy positions. A sweep through the area after the ambush found six enemy bodies.

Throughout the remainder of their tour in Vietnam, ambushes and sniper fire were met with a hail of heavy machine gun fire and the roar of gun truck engines. The intencity and frequency of attacks subsided after the Spring of 1968. The attacks were reduced to a few scattered sniper and squad sized ambushes. Still the men of the 8th made the enemy pay whenever he attacked.

The road war ended in September of 1968. During a year of battle, the enemy was unable to either close Route 19 or destroy the 8th Transportation Group. Between 2 September 1967 and 2 September 1968, the Group was ambushed a total of thirty-six times. The unit had lost thirty-eight soldiers killed and 204 wounded. The enemy had lost 116 men confirmed killed and fifteen wounded. During the same period the unit delivered 597,572 tons of cargo and over four million gallons of fuel. In the course of accomplishing their mission they drove 7,331,924 miles.

At the end of September the enemy withdrew. Tacit acknowledgment that the American truck drivers and their gun trucks had won the campaign. When the 8th Transportation Group was withdrawn from Vietnam on 28 April 1971, they were operating many of the older style gun trucks as well as 5-ton trucks with abandoned M113 armored personal carriers mounted in the beds.

Gun Truck Armor And Armament

The Army manual for hardening a vehicle or creating a gun truck recommended the use of sandbags. Although sandbags may have been effective in stopping enemy small arms rounds, they required back-breaking labor to fill, had to be constantly replaced and became saturated and heavy when wet. The added weight of rows of saturated sandbags could rapidly approach the weight of armor plating.

Once the 8th Transportation Group decided on armor plating their trucks, several different designs were tried. In mid-1967, the armor plating was simply attached to the sides of the truck. The crews, however, found that even with the armor, they were still vulnerable, especially at the vehicle corners. The next gun truck version, which appeared in late 1967, had reinforced armor at the truck bed corners. This configuration worked reasonably well, but there were still problems. Enemy Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs) and heavy machine guns could still penetrate the armor plating. In order to give themselves some added protection the crews spaced the armor.

In spaced armor, the outside sheet of armor was applied as normal. These were then braced against another sheet of armor, of the same length, which was positioned behind the first sheet along the inside of the truck bed. This left a small gap between the armor sheets and this was filled with sandbags for added protection. Armor plate was also put on the rear of the bed, doors and windshield. Sandbags were put on the floor of the cab and on other vital parts of the truck. Even this version, however, had a major weak point. The top of the truck was still open. Enemy troops could lob grenades into the bed of the truck causing catastrophic losses to the crew.

Finally, the ultimate version of the gun truck appeared. This combined the chassis of an M113 armored personal carrier and a M54 5-ton truck. This configuration came about as a result of an armor plate shortage in Vietnam. The requirement to build new gun trucks and repair damaged vehicles, required a lot of armor plate. When the supply and maintenance services could not keep up with demand, the men of the 8th Transportation Group went looking for alternative ways of protecting their trucks. It did not take the truck drivers long to find several badly damaged M113 Armored Personnel Carriers. These vehicles fit perfectly into the back of a 5-ton truck and made an instant gun truck. The resulting configuration gave the crews optimum protection and excellent mounts for their weapons.

The Trucks: M35

The gun trucks and the majority of the cargo trucks which supported the U.S. war effort in Vietnam were two and a half ton, 6x6, M35A1s and M35A2s. The Reo Company began producing the M35s during 1953, and from the start the vehicle proved itself to be a versatile and reliable performer. In fact, more M35s have been produced than any other military truck in the world. The original truck was equipped with Reo/Continental six cylinder, in-line, OA 331 gasoline engine. It had a five speed manual transmission and two-speed transfer. This arrangement allowed the truck to operate in four or six wheel drive. In six wheel drive the truck was capable of negotiating muddy or difficult ter-

A line of M35 two and a half ton trucks parked nose to tail in preparation for moving out on a convoy. The M35 was the first to be converted to the gun truck configuration. (Dennis Berg)

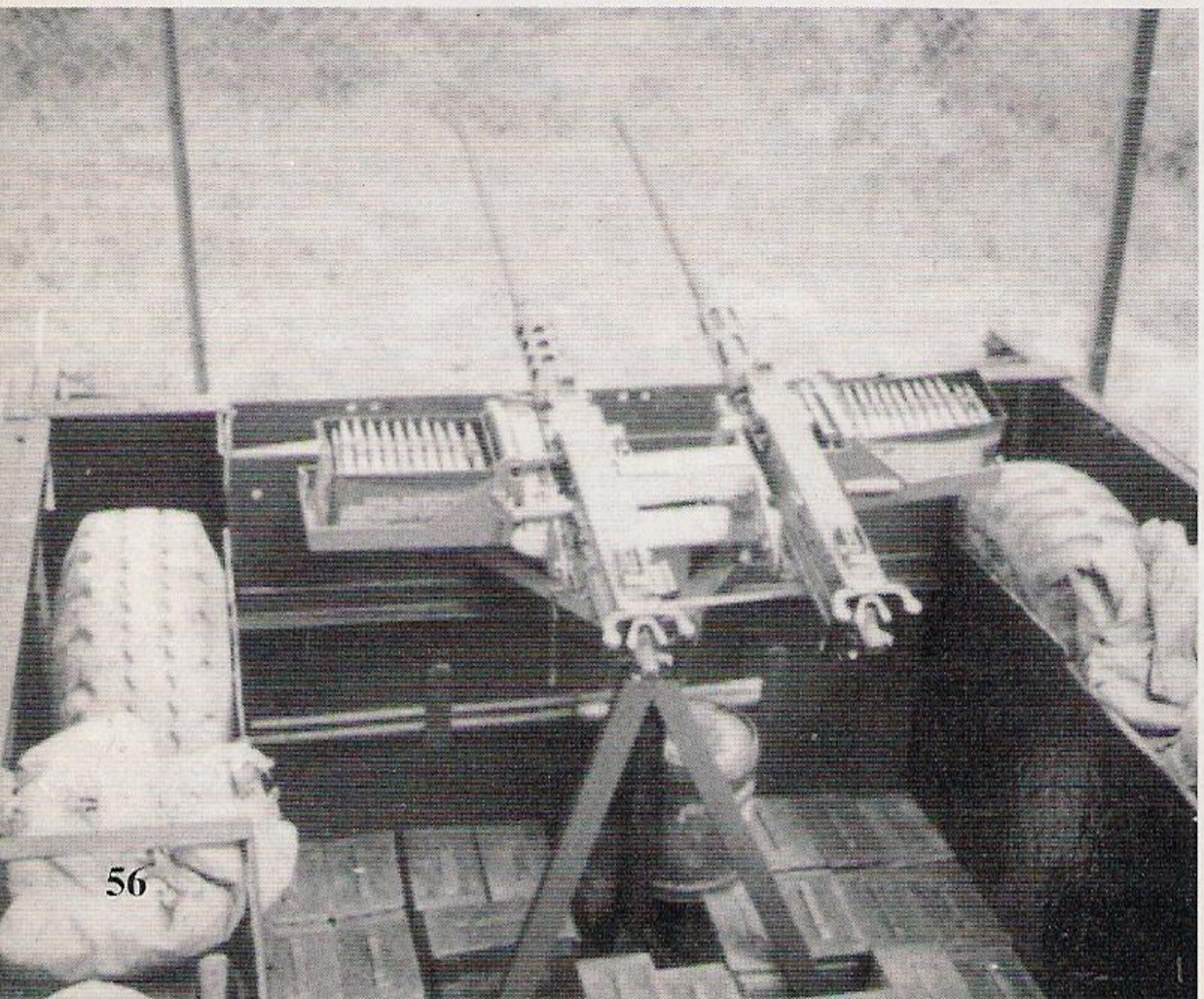
Enemy action, weather and constant pounding took a toll on the gun trucks. The *EVE OF DESTRUCTION* was one 5 ton that was damaged and was being rebuilt. The construction process and the types of material used in building the trucks varied, but she was fairly standard. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

rain. The truck was twenty-one feet nine inches long and had a 154 inch wheel base. Without a winch, it weighed 12,465 pounds. Fully loaded it could carry two and a half tons of cargo across rough terrain and five tons on the highway. It could carry eighteen combat loaded troops or twenty in garrison.

In addition to the cargo version, a refueler, water tanker, dump truck, earth auger and several other variants were built. During the 1960s, the Army updated the M35 fleet. The standard gasoline engine was replaced with a Continental LDS 427-2 multi-fuel engine. The dimensions of the truck remained the same although the weight increased to 13,443 pounds.

In normal combat operations one in five trucks was equipped with a Browning M2, .50 caliber, heavy machine gun. The mount was located on the passengers side of the cab, just above the windshield. The gunner stood on the seat and could traverse the gun a full 360 degrees. Protection for the driver and embarked troops was provided by laying

This late model double walled gun truck carried a twin mount for the two M2 .50 caliber machine guns at the rear of the truck bed. These gun mounts were locally manufactured by unit armorers and maintenance personnel in the motor pool workshops. The floor of the vehicle was covered with extra ammunition boxes. Spare tires and other essential items were stowed in the box created by the double armor walls. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



This gun truck is armed with three Browning M2 .50 caliber heavy machine guns, one single mount in the front of the bed and a twin mount in the rear of the vehicle. This gun quickly became a favorite of gun truck crews for its heavy fire power. One draw back was that few of the gun truck crew men had ever received proper training on firing the M2 .50 caliber machine gun. To overcome this problem, live firing training was done on the basic unit level (company) at the 8th Transportation Group base camp at Qhi Nhon. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

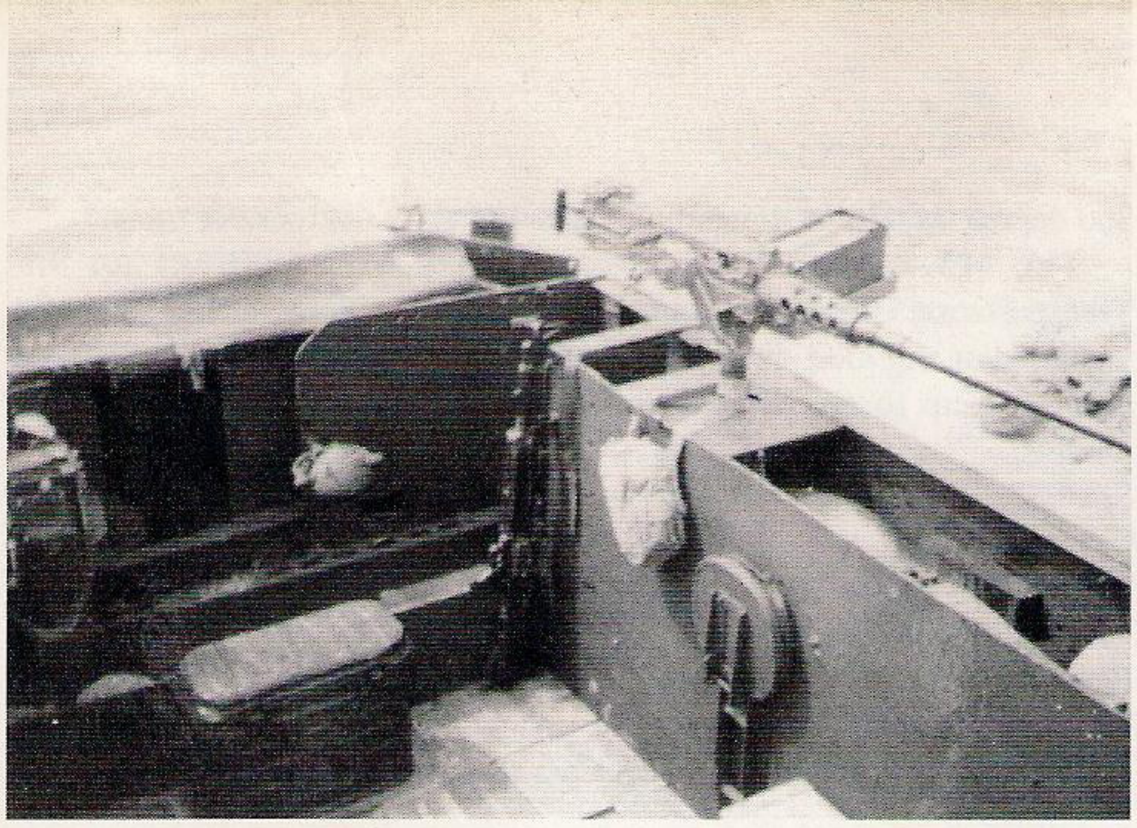
sandbags on the cab floor and bed of the truck. Sandbags were also placed over the fuel tanks and other critical components of the truck. In Vietnam , however, this arrangement soon proved unsuitable. The sandbags only protected the soldiers from the effects of land mines. They provided no protection from enemy rifle or machine gun fire. In addition, having the gunner standing, exposed in the cab of truck, soon proved unsatisfactory. It did not take the Army truckers long to fix the problem.

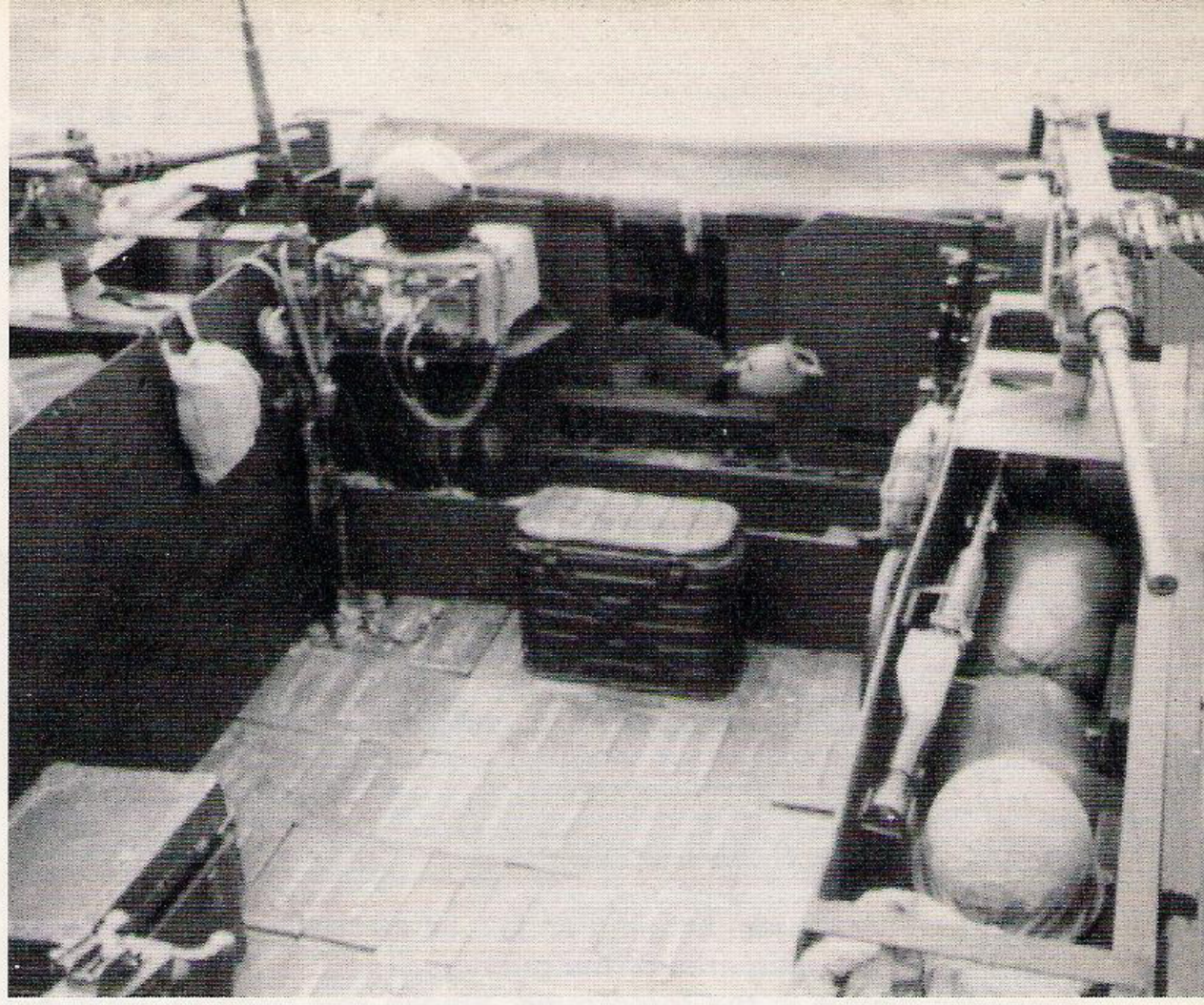
The M35A2C is still in use by the Army today. The 18th Airborne Corps and the Seventh Transportation Group, among others, still operate fleets of these reliable and durable trucks. In fact, during the late 1980s the U.S. Military tried to replace all of the M35s with newer five ton versions of the cargo trucks. Many units, however, refused to trade their trucks and M35s stayed in the inventory.

M54 FIVE TON

The M54 five ton truck is the big brother of the M35. They were introduced into the Army during the early 1950s and followed the basic design and shape of the M35. The body was strengthened to carry more weight. A 602 cubic inch displacement, in-line six cylinder R-6602 engine was installed to power the truck. As the truck went into service, this engine was found to be under powered and a new Mack 672 cubic inch displacement diesel engine with turbo-charger was installed in the later models. By the time the truck went to Vietnam, it had been modified into the A2 version. The new version had a Continental LD 465-1A turbo-charged diesel engine under the hood and was capable of carrying ten tons across a smooth highway.

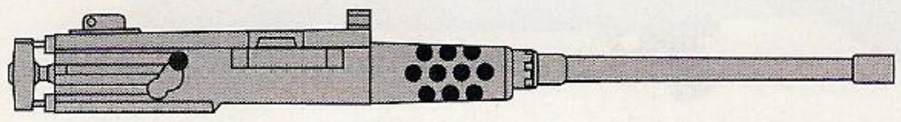
The M54 became a gun truck because of its ability to carry more weight. The maintenance crews of the 8th Transportation Group quickly found that a M35 loaded with armor, guns and ammunition was close to its maximum allowable weight. In fact, when the heavily loaded M35s hit pot holes in the road they would often damage or destroy the truck's suspension. In order to handle the greater weight of weapons and armor, the M54 became the preferred chassis for gun truck conversion.





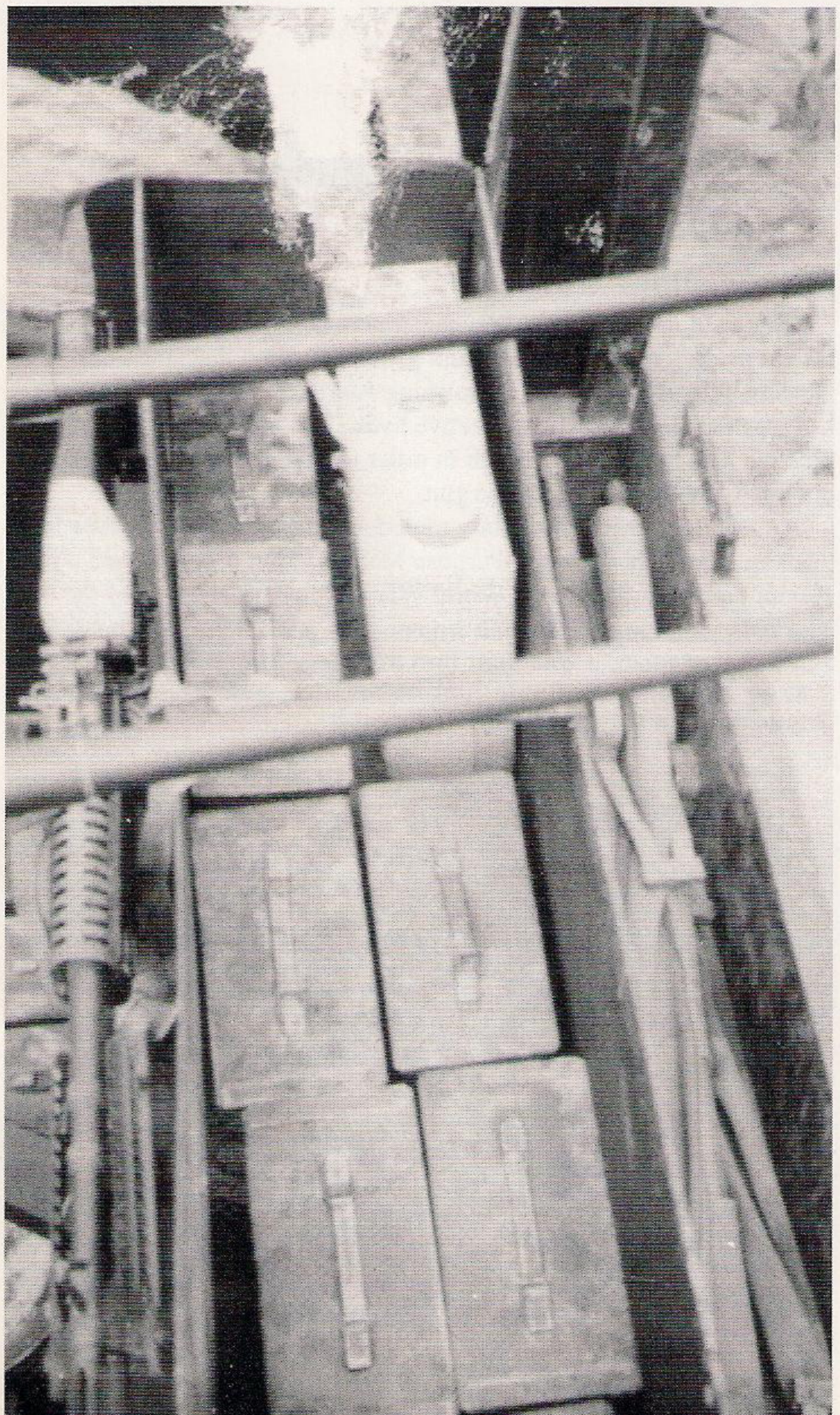
(Above & Left) This is gun truck was also a late model double armor side version. The bottom of the bed was literally covered with extra ammunition boxes. A 7.62MM M60 machine gun was stowed in a rack against the forward armor and another was stowed in the area between the side armor plates. These guns were spares and for use in case a M2 .50 caliber machine gun jammed or broke down. Sandbags are also visible between the armor plate for added protection. There was a radio and armored crewman's helmet against the forward bulkhead. Communication between gun trucks was critical during battle and radios and headsets were often "scrounged" by the crewman from whatever sources were available. This truck had a jump seat added near the front, within easy reach of the M2 .50 caliber machine gun and spare M60. The can in the center is a vacuum can which contained hot food. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The Weapons:



Browning M2 .50 Caliber Heavy Machine Gun

The rear armor section of this gun truck has been modified to carry spare ammunition, a carton of C-Rations and a stretcher. The M60 was mounted on the inside armor wall and the barrels of the twin M2 .50 caliber machine guns extend over the rear of the truck. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



The Browning M2 .50 caliber heavy machine gun is one of the longest-lived machine guns in the U.S. inventory. It was originally developed at the end of the First World War as an improved and heavier version of the standard Model 1911 .30 caliber Browning machine gun. It was first produced in quantity during 1921 and has since undergone a number of changes. It served in various forms throughout the Second World War and Korea. The weapon's heavy hitting and penetration power made it an ideal weapon for many purposes. It quickly became

A single M2 .50 caliber on a standard pintle mounting. The weapon was loaded, indicating that the vehicle is ready to move out. Stretchers, canvas and a seat for weary gunners were carried in the rear of the truck. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

A gun truck crewman manning an M2 .50 machine gun gives some idea of the operating area of the gunners. There is a box of smoke grenades visible in the foreground. Smoke was used to guide air strikes and medevac helicopters to the scene of an ambush. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

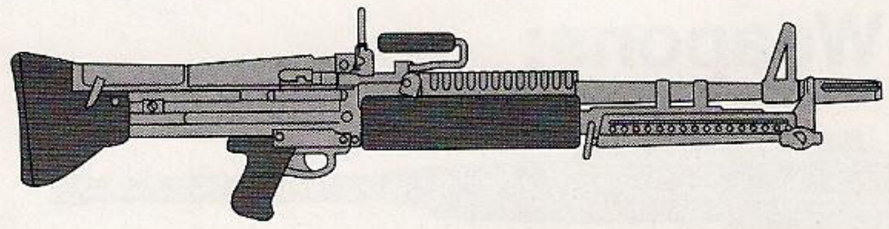
the standard anti-aircraft/anti-personnel weapon on American tanks, trucks and armored vehicles. During the Second World War, the M2 was the standard aircraft machine gun, arming fighters and bombers. The infantry found its firepower to their liking and the M2 was soon became an effective perimeter defensive weapon.

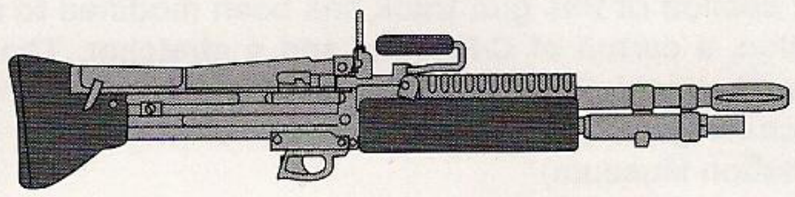
The only draw back to the M2 was that in continuous operation the barrel became exceedingly hot. Hot enough, in fact, to actually melt the barrel. In order to improve the operation of the gun, the barrel was thickened to improve the distribution of heat during firing. The resulting modification was designated the M2HB (Heavy Barrel). Some M2HB machine guns had their rate of fire increased to 700 rounds per minute, but this was found to cause rapid barrel fatigue and not many guns were actually modified.

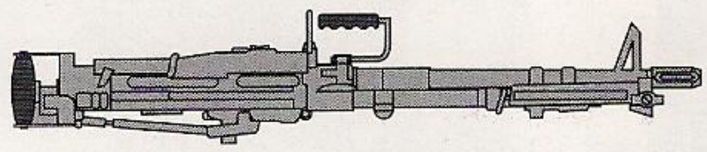
The government also developed the .50 caliber machine gun into an excellent anti-aircraft weapon. Although it was effective when used singly, the slow rate of fire did not give the gunners much of a chance to hit fast moving targets. In order to improve the rate of fire, M2s were mounted in dual and quad configurations. The quad-fifty's, as they were known, proved to be an extremely effective anti-aircraft and anti-personnel weapon in three wars, WW II, Korea and Vietnam. The quad .50 turret mounting was carried on half tracks during the Second World War (M16), in a towed version, and mounted on trucks (M55). The turret could be elevated from minus ten degrees to plus ninety degrees, had a 360 degree traverse at a maximum speed of sixty degrees per second.

The M2 was used in a wide variety of mountings on 8th Transportation Group gun trucks. The gun could be mounted as a single weapon, or coupled as pairs. It was not uncommon to find trucks mounting up to six M2s, usually two twin mounts and two single mounts.

Specifications:
Caliber .50
Length 3.75 feet
Weight 65.7 pounds
Effective Range 1,400 meters
Muzzle Velocity 884meters/second
Cyclic Rate of Fire 400-500 rounds per minute







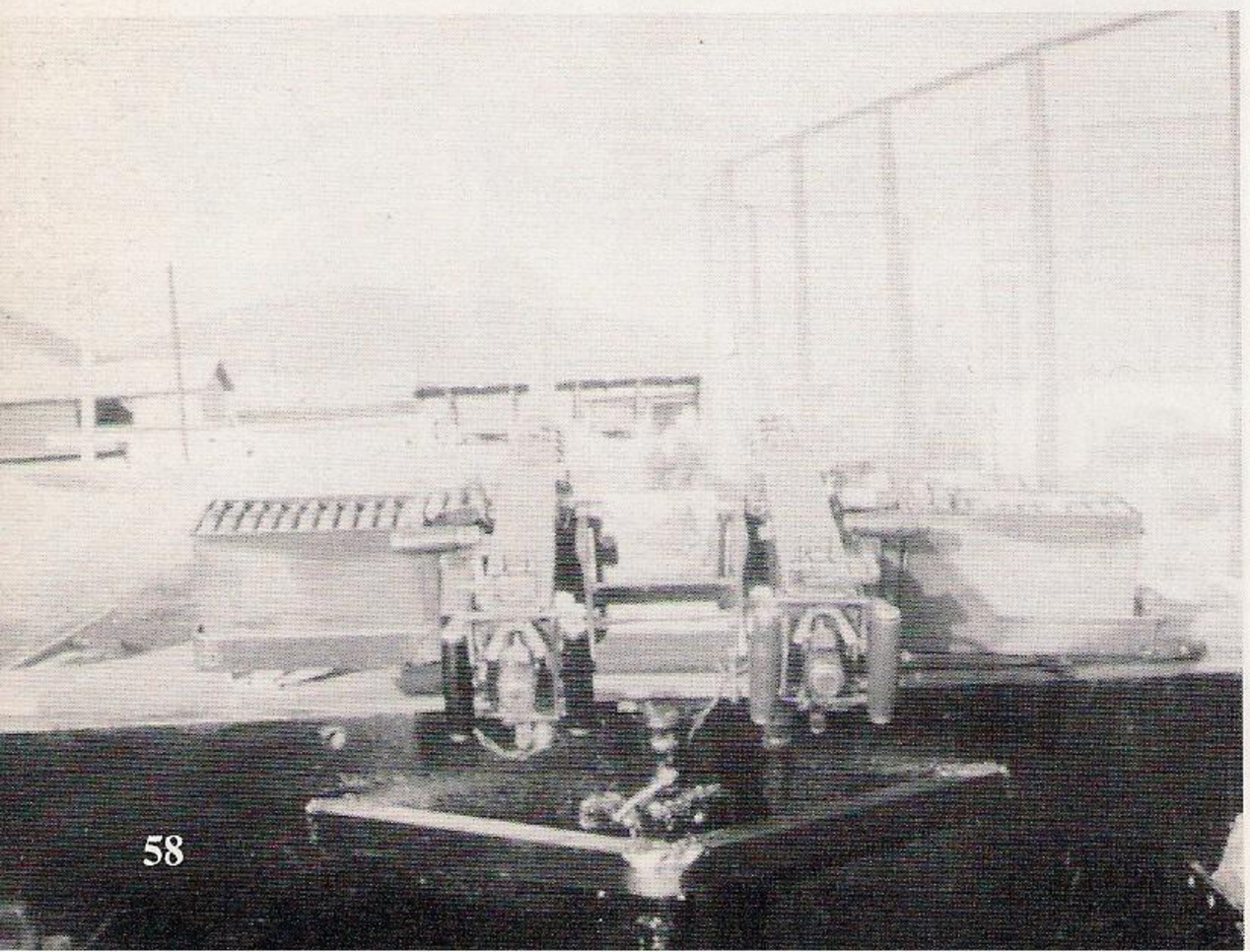
M60 Machine Gun

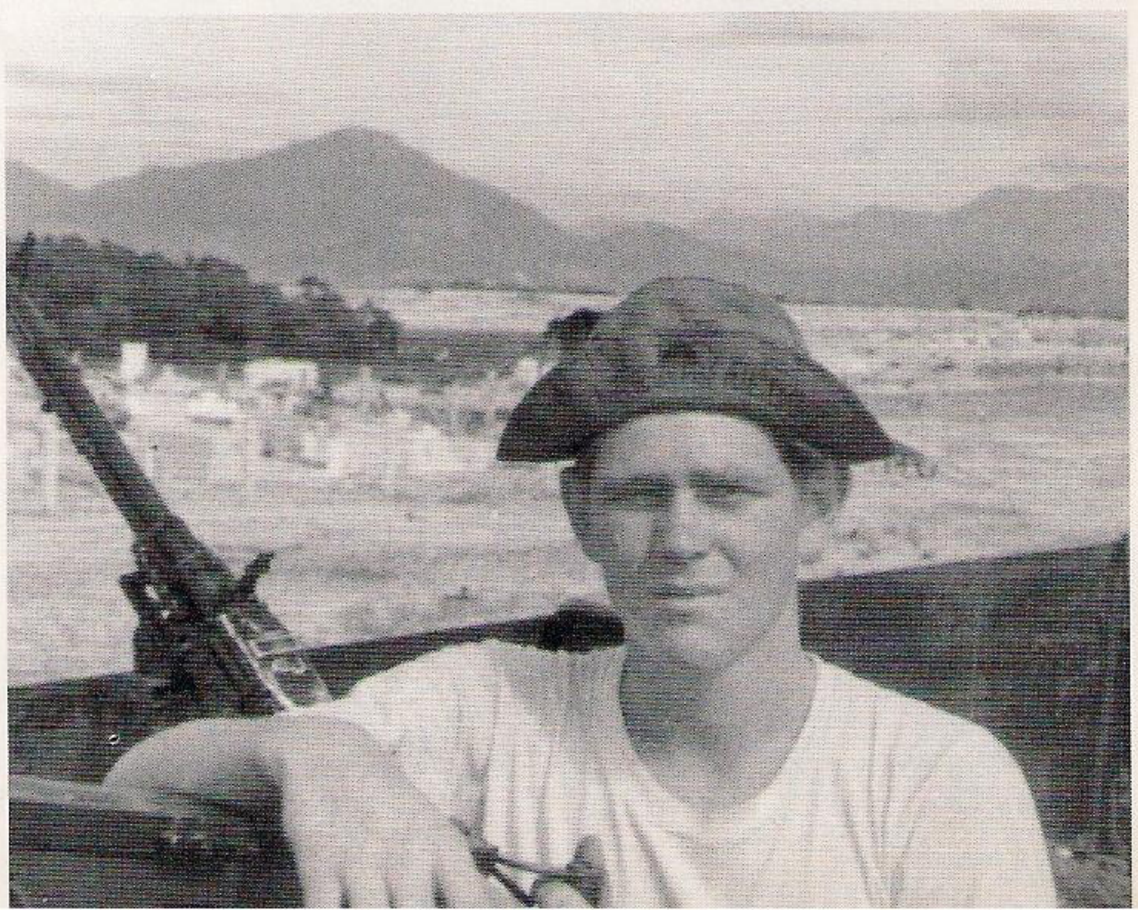
At the end of the Korean War the American military began searching for a replacement for their light and general purpose machine guns. The .30 caliber machine guns and Browning Automatic Rifles then in service had reached the end of their effective lives. The military wanted to combine the best features of the two in order to give the infantry platoon an effective, light-weight, machine gun.

In the early 1960s, the military took delivery of the new 7.62MM M60 machine gun. This General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG) had a feed system based on the Second World War German MG42, one of the best

A twin M2 .50 caliber machine gun mount bolted to the rear armor of a gun truck. These guns are fully loaded and ready for action. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

The men who crewed the gun trucks were typical young Americans. For many of them, it was their first trip away from home. There is a 7.62MM M60 mount visible just behind the gunner. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)





The gun truckers were always on the look out for new and better weapons. This new gun truck was armed with a Browning M2 .50 caliber machine gun in the front and an XM134 7.62MM General Electric Minigun taken from a downed U.S. helicopter. The Minigun had six barrels and could fire at a maximum rate of 6,000 rounds a minute. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

machine guns of that period. The gun was light weight, easy to maintain in the field and had a high rate of fire. This machine gun soon gained popularity with the infantry, who found the gun could be fired from its tripod, bipod or while on the move. It became so popular, in fact, that it was soon adopted for use as secondary armament on armored personnel carriers and other vehicles.

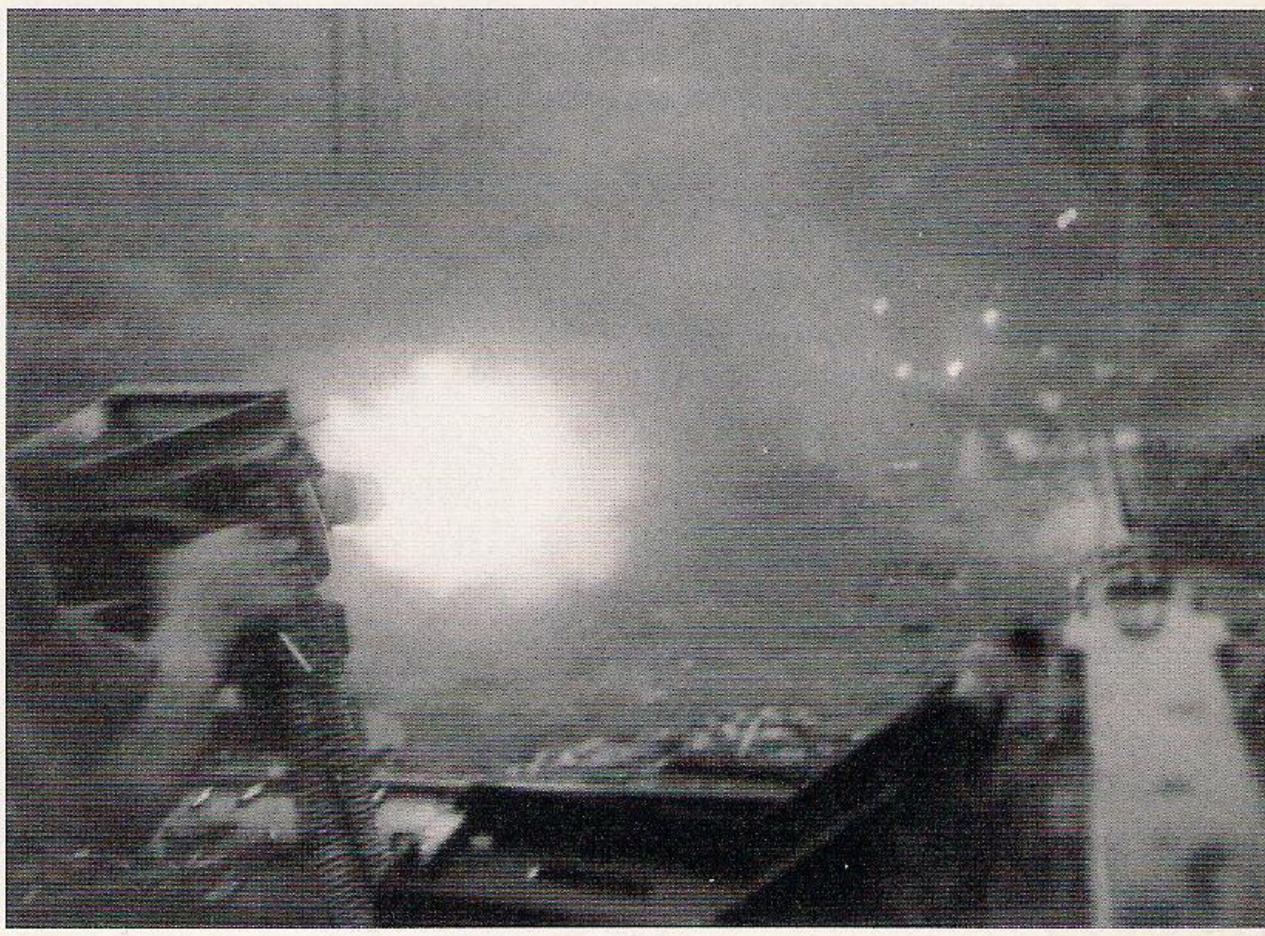
Specifications:
Caliber 7.62MM
Length 3.64 feet
Weight 22.8 pounds
Effective Range 900 meters
Muzzle Velocity 850 meters/second
Cyclic Rate of Fire 600 rounds per minute

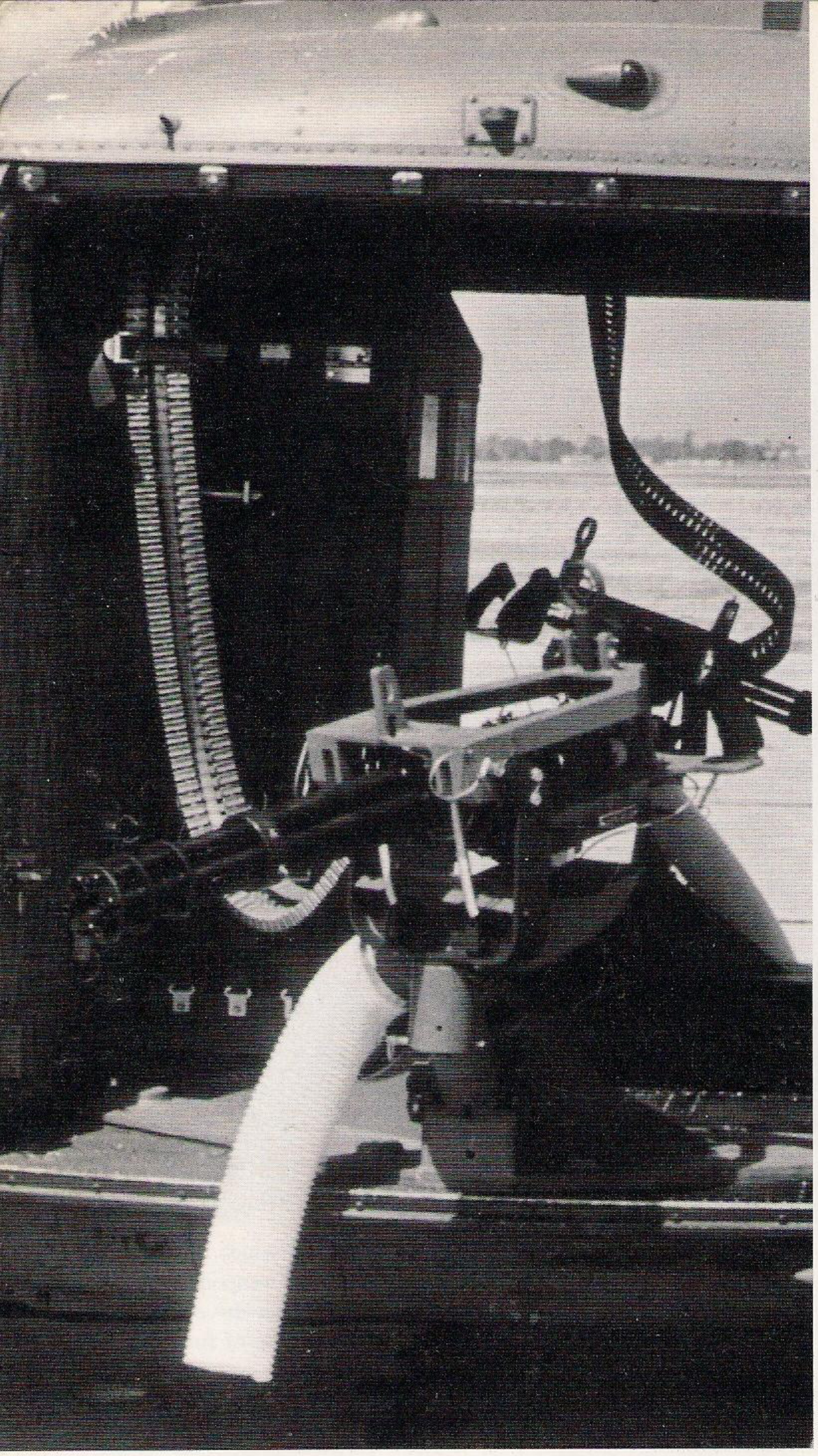
XM134 Minigun

The General Electric 7.62MM XM134 Minigun was originally developed for use on aircraft and helicopters. It was based on the 20MM Vulcan cannon which armed a number of front-line American combat aircraft.

The weapon was based on the Gatling principle, which consisted of multiple rotating barrels firing in turn. This gave the weapon a high rate of fire in comparison to its weight. The Minigun was driven by a 28-volt electric motor which gave the gun a selective rate of fire of either

The XM134 Minigun in action. Each of the bright dots was a tracer round and every fifth round was a tracer. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)





The 7.62MM XM134 Minigun system was designed for use on helicoptersl, like this UH-1. Gun truck crews obtained their Miniguns from wrecked helicopters and adopted the system for their use. (Bell)

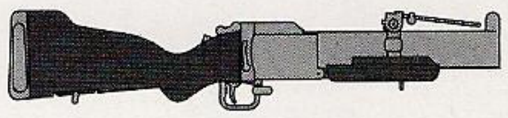
4,000 rounds per minute, 6,000 rounds per minute at its highest rate of fire, or 300 rounds per minute for its slowest rate of fire.

Gun truck crews obtained their Miniguns from wrecked helicopters and adopted the system for their use. Normally, a gun truck would mount two such guns, firing to either side, along with M2 .50 caliber weapons.

Specifications:
Caliber 7.62MM
Length 2.62feet
Weight 76 pounds
Muzzle Velocity 869 meters/second
Cyclic Rate of Fire up to 6,000 rounds per minute

M79 Grenade Launcher

Gun trucks were well suited for the 7.72MM XM134 Minigun. The trucks could provide the electric power needed to power the gun and could carry the massive amounts of ammunition the gun required. Some gun trucks equipped with Miniguns actually towed trailers loaded with extra ammunition. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



The grenade has always been an effective weapon for the infantry. Its major drawback, however, has always been its lack of range. It was limited by how far an infantryman could throw it. During the Second World War the major combatants all developed rifle grenade launchers. This simple devices attached to the end of the combat rifle and shot a specially modified grenade. Although they increased the range, they

A soldier fires a 40MM M79 grenade launcher at enemy positions. A good gunner was albe to hit tagets at ranges up to 150 meters (164 yards). The M79 was a valuable weapon in defeating an ambush. (Army)

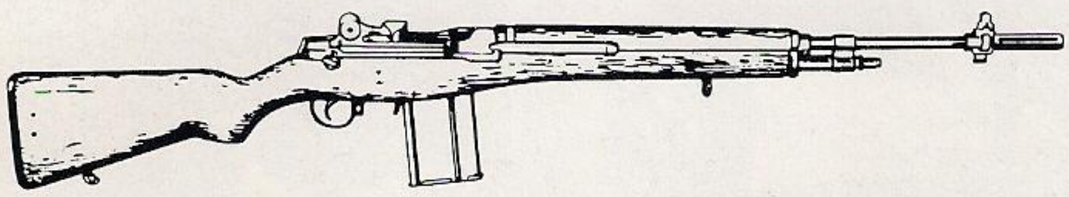
A young Sergeant boards his truck. He was dressed in a flak jacket, helmet and armed with grenades, a .45 caliber M1911 pistol, and a M79 40MM grenade lanucher. (Dennis Berg)

were bulky and difficult to fire.

Just before the beginning of the Vietnam War the Army took delivery of a new style of grenade launcher. The M79 grenade launcher or "Mule's Leg" was a single shot, brake action, shotgun like weapon which fired a 40MM grenade. The M79 was capable of firing several different types of ammunition including high explosive, smoke, tear gas, buck shot, parachute smoke, airburst projectile, canister and several others. In the hands of a competent grenadier the weapon was deadly. A good gunner could put a round through a window at ranges of up to 150 meters (164 yards). It was particularly useful in hitting enemy troops that were hiding behind obstacles or in trenches.

Although the M79 could only perform the functions of grenade launcher, its effectiveness in combat more than made up for the loss of firepower of one rifle.

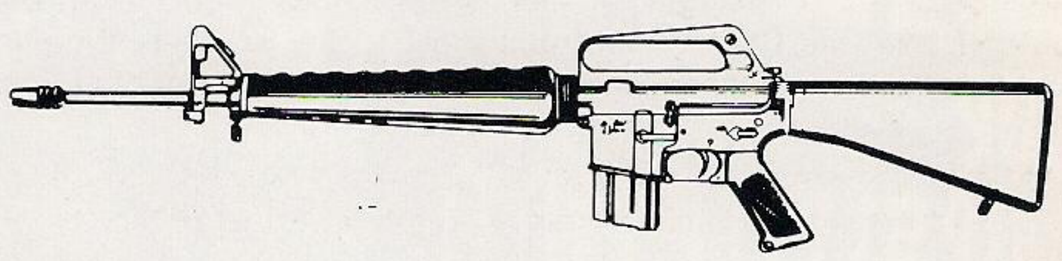
Specifications:
Caliber 40MM
Length 2.39 feet
Weight 6.4 pounds
Range 400 meters
Rate of Fire 5 or 6 aimed rounds per minute



M14 Rifle:

When the 8th first arrived in Vietnam they were armed with the 7.62MM M14 rifle, the sucessor to the Second World War M1 Garand. The M14 was highly accurate and was a great improvement over the M1, especially in its feed, a twenty round magazine.

Specifications:
Caliber 7.62MM
Length 3.66 feet
Weight 11.2 pounds
Range 700 meters



M16 Rifle

The M16 rifle was introduced during the early 1960s and quickly became the standard infantry weapon in Vietnam. Once the initial problems were resolved, the M16 became very popular for its light weight and fire power.

Specifications:
Caliber 5.56MM
Length 3 feet
Weight 6.6 pounds
Range 400 meters
Rate of Fire 700-950 rounds per minute

Known Gun Truck Names

Name	Unit
EVE OF DESTRUCTION	523rd Transportation Co
IRON BUTTERFLY	512th Transportation Co
NANCY	444th Transportation Co
THE UNTOUCHABLE	359th Transportation Co
THE RED BARON	8th Group
BAD DREAM	541st Transportation Co
AMERICAN BREED	Battery E, 41st Arty
KING COBRA	597th Transportation Co
EASY RIDER	Battery E, 41st Arty
BIG BAD JOHN	8th Group
UNCLE MEAT	523th Transportation Co
BLACK WIDOW	523th Transportation Co
SIR CHARLES	597th Transportation Co
MAVERICK	8th Group
THE BIG KAHUNA	58th Transportation Co
INVADER II	299th Engineer Batt
MACHO	8th Group
OLD GRAND-DAD	8th Group
SNOOPY	444th Transportation Co
THE ASSASSIN	57th Transportation Co

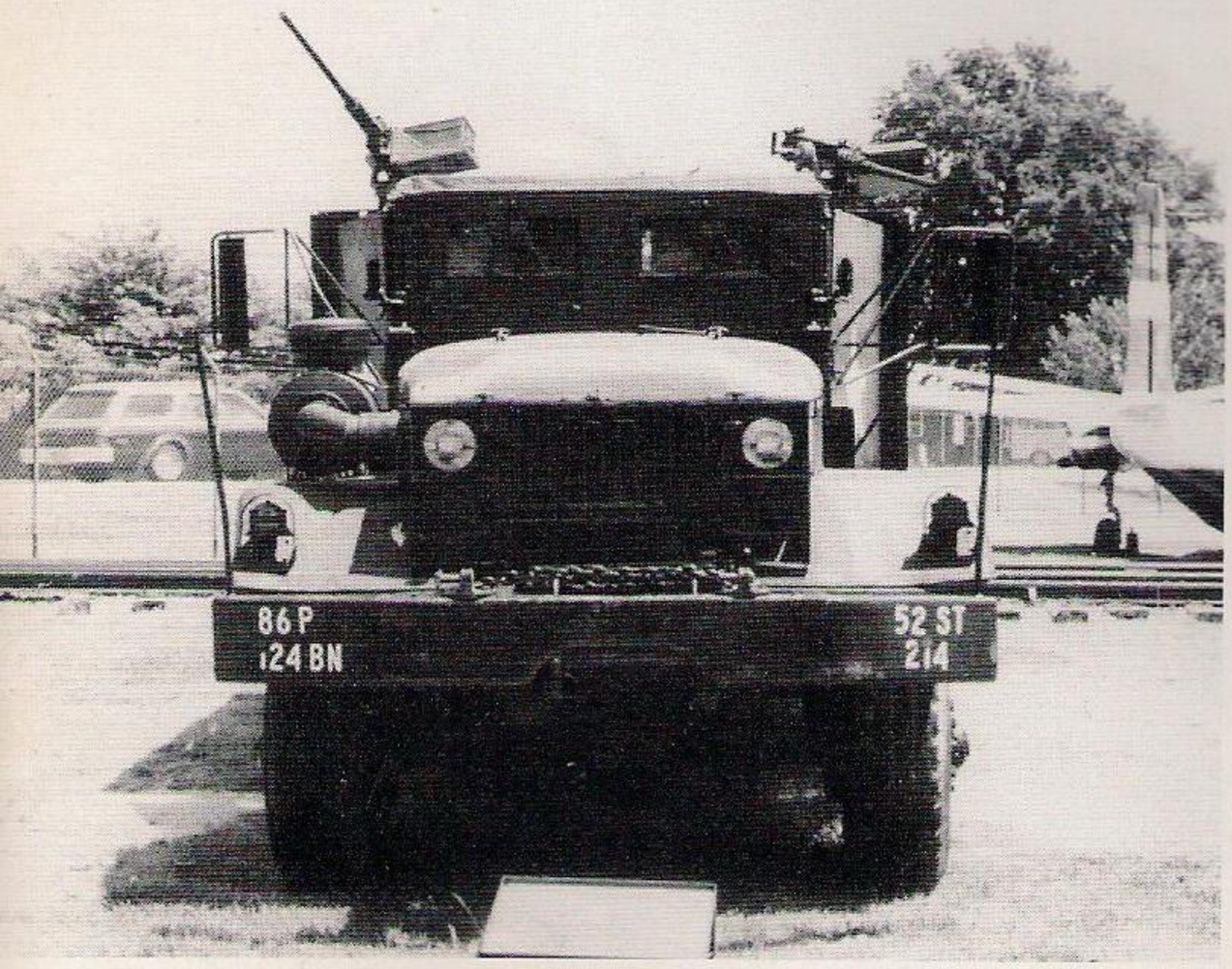
The *EVE OF DESTRUCTION* was taken to the dock in Vietnam by her crew and shipped home. Some say the truck arrived back in the States with her weapons still on board and full ammunition boxes covering the floor. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Name	Unit
KING KONG	523rd Transportation Co
THE MERCENARY	363rd Transportation Co
THE JUSTIFIER	57th Transportation Co
SATAN'S LITTLE ANGEL	523rd Transportation Co
ANGEL	523rd Transportation Co
PROUD AMERICAN	523rd Transportation Co
ACE OF SPADES	523rd Transportation Co
BRUTUS	359th Transportation Co
DEVIL WOMAN	8th Group
PANDEMONIUM	8th Group
COLD SWEAT	523rd Transportation Co
MIGHTY MINI	64th Transportation Co
LITTLE RESPECT	444th Transportation Co
BUDAH/GREEK GOD	124th Transportation Co
THE GAMBLERS	27th Transportation Btn
THE HAWK	54th Transportation Btn

E*VE OF DESTRUCTION* is off-loaded in Virginia after being returned to the Unites States. *EVE* was the only 8th Transportation Group gun truck to be preserved . (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)

Name	Unit
POISON IVY	8th Group
SATANS CHARIOT	8th Group
THE BOSS	8th Group
OUTLAW	359th Transportation Co
SIR CHARLES	597th Transportation Co
THE MISFITS	8th Group
OKLAHOMA	597th Transportation Co
BOUNTY HUNTER	444th Transportation Co
HIGHLAND RAIDERS	64th Transportation Co
BURKE'S LAW	563rd Transportation Co
LOVE AND PEACE	8th Group
STEPPING WOLF	512th Transportation Co
MATCH BOX	523rd Transportation Co
TRUE GRIT	523rd Transportation Co
BROWN'S BLAZERS	8th Group
HIGHLAND ANIMALS	527th Transportation Co

The *EVE OF DESTRUCTION* is now on display in the United States Army Transportation Center, Fort Eustis, Virginia. (U.S. Army Transportation Museum)



Name	Unit
HO CHI'S HEARSE	64th Transportation Co
LITTLE AMANDA	8th Group
OLD IRONSIDE	8th Group
THE ROAD RUNNER	8th Group
UNDERTAKER	8th Group
VENDETTA	8th Group
CANNED HEAT	363rd Transportation Co
THE LIFER	563rd Transportation Co
PEACEMAKER	563rd Transportation Co
LIL SURE SHOT	805th Transportation Co
BLACK WIDOW	523rd Transportation Co
BORN LOSER	585th Transportation Co
THE COLONEL	363rd Transportation Co
MADAM PELE	2nd Transportation Co
THE PALLBEARERS	363rd Transportation Co
EXECUTIONER	57th Transportation Co
VENGEANCE IS MINE	512th Transportation Co
GODZILLA	512th Transportation Co
BRINK'S ARMORED TRUCK SERVICE	8th Group
SET ME FREE AND LT CALLEY	572ndTransportation Co
LUCKY KATHLEEN	Unit Unknown

SNOOPY, moves out of the 8th Transportation Group motor pool at Qui Nhon to take up position at the lead of another convoy on Route 19.

DAN GREER

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